

CHAPTER 3: TRANSPORTATION



Photos 2 and 4 above by Randy Uhl

3.1 Introduction

The transportation network is the backbone upon which a community bases its economy; access to resources and connection to other communities form a critical link to continued development and growth. Maintenance and repair, in addition to periodic additions and enhancement of this system, are essential for preserving connectivity for county residents, visitors, and businesses. Keeping pace with changes in transportation trends and network use is also essential to anticipate needed improvements and potential additions to the transportation network.

3.2 Inventory of Existing Transportation Facilities

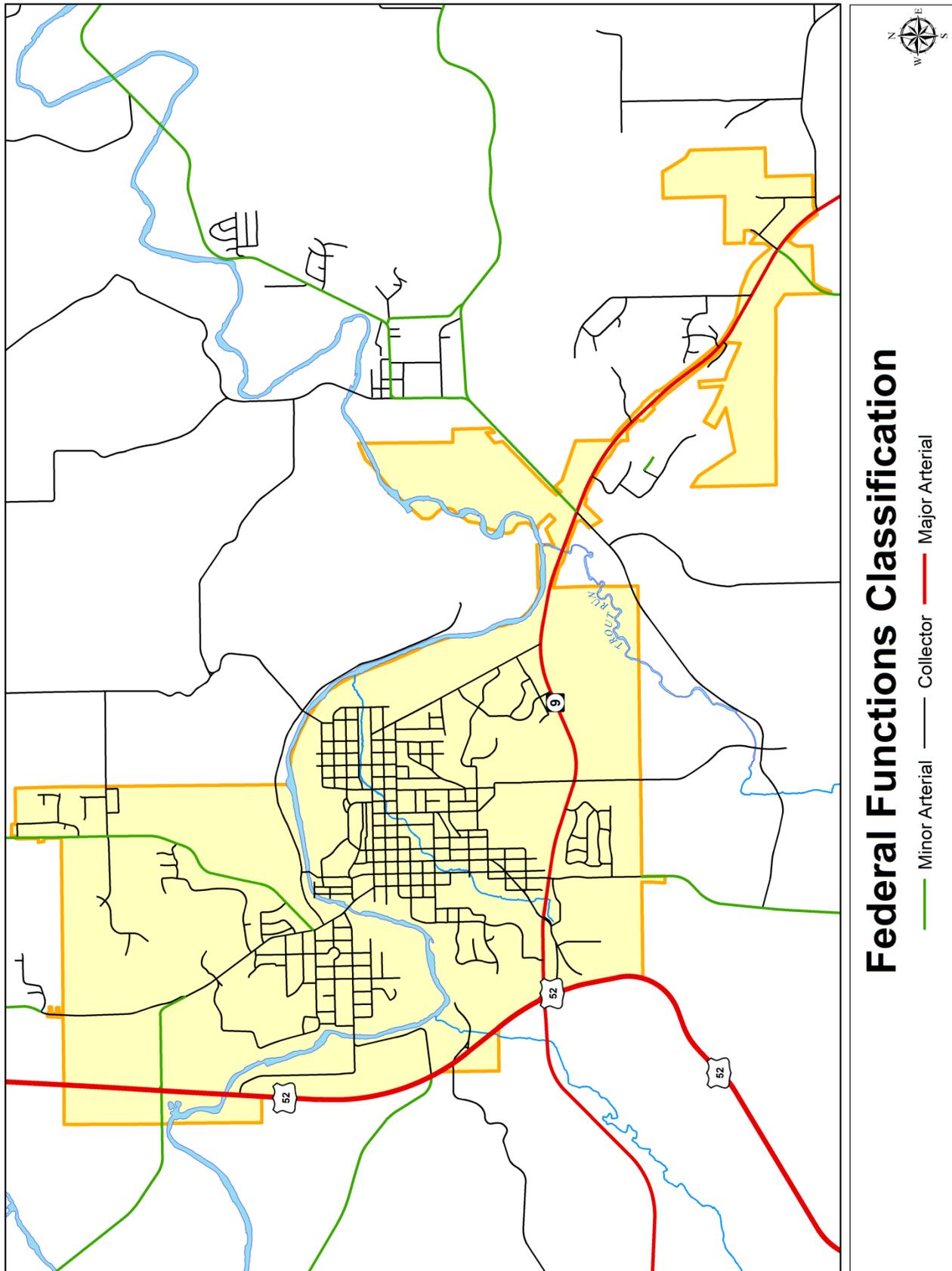
Transportation facilities in the City of Decorah are basic facilities ranging from city roads to state highways, as well as a trails and sidewalks. Residents of Decorah rely on personal vehicles to meet most of their transportation needs. Decorah offers a fairly extensive trail and sidewalk system for a community of its size, giving residents safe access throughout the community. Other modes of transportation include private taxi service and a transit service provided by Northeast Iowa Community Action.

3.3 Functional Classification System

Chapter 306 of the Code of Iowa provides for the functional classification of all highways, roads, and streets in the state into categories according to the character of service they provide. The classification of streets and roads in each county is periodically updated to be current with city boundary changes and the function of the streets. The classification system serves as a basis for determining future priorities, funds distribution, and jurisdiction over the various highway, roads, and streets in the state.

Municipal streets are classified into three categories: the municipal arterial system, the municipal collector system, and the municipal service system. Municipal streets that provide continuity to the state primary and county secondary road systems are classified as extensions to these systems. These range from freeway-expressway, arterial, and arterial connectors to trunk and trunk collectors. Figure 4 shows the functional classification of streets and roads in the city and the planning area, as provided by the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT).

Figure 4: Federal Functions Classification



The freeway-expressway system includes those roads that connect and serve major urban and regional areas with high volume and long-distance traffic movements. There are no roads in the county or the city classified as part of the freeway-expressway system. The nearest freeway-expressway roads are I-90 (54 miles), I-380 (82 miles) and I-35 (87 miles).

The arterial system includes those roads which connect minor arterials (arterial connectors) to the freeway-expressway system and serve long-distance movements of traffic. Minor arterials or arterial connectors include streets and roads which serve as major traffic carriers for short distances, providing connections to the arterial and freeway-expressway system. Highway 9 and 52, and Highway 150 located further to the south, are classified as part of the arterial system.

The trunk system includes county roads that serve principal traffic generators and connect such areas to other trunk roads and to the arterial and freeway-expressway systems. Trunk extensions in the city include Short Street, Mechanic Street, Locust Road, Water Street, Division Street, and segments of Pole Line Road, and College Drive. These streets function as a trunk extension of County Road W38. Other trunk roads in the planning area include County Roads W30 and A34 west of the city, and County Road W42 southeast of the city.

Several streets in the city have been designated as municipal arterials. These streets serve the principal local traffic generators and connect such areas to other municipal arterials and the primary road system. Municipal arterials include Montgomery Street, Water Street, Fifth Avenue, Pulpit Rock Road, Pole Line Road, Locust Road, Mechanic Street, Short Street, and College Drive.

The municipal collectors in the city and trunk collectors in the rural areas collect traffic from the local service streets and roads and connect to the arterial streets systems. As indicated in Figure 4, several north-south and east-west streets in the city are classified as collectors. County Road W38 located south of Decorah is classified as a trunk collector. County Roads W38, A52, and A64 serving the Freeport community are also classified as trunk collectors which collect and feed traffic to Highway 9.

The principal east-west municipal collectors in Decorah include Broadway Street, Railroad Avenue, and Pearl Street. The principal north-south municipal collectors are Washington Street, Division Street, College Drive, Pleasant Avenue, A52 (Old Stage Road), and Ravine Street. The remaining streets are classified as local service streets that provide access to adjoining properties and connect to the collector and arterial street systems.

3.4 Traffic Volumes

Traffic counts made by the IDOT in 2009 indicate that the most heavily traveled street in Decorah is Montgomery Street. The traffic volumes on this street varied from 9,700 at IA Highway 9 to 11,000 vehicles per day in the block located directly south of the intersection with E. Main Street. The principal arterial in Decorah is Highway 9, which according to the 2009 IDOT traffic counts, had average daily traffic volumes between 14,100 and 6,100 vehicles per day in the segment between the west corporate limits and Old Stage Road intersection. U.S. Highway 52 had average traffic volumes of almost 4,800 vehicles per day south of the intersection with Highway 9. Segments of Water Street and College Drive had traffic volumes of 7,700 and 10,100 vehicles per day respectively. Mechanic Street/Short Street had a high traffic volume of 8,300 vehicles per day. Other streets with relatively high traffic volumes include Fifth Avenue with 2,500 vehicles per day, Broadway Street with 4,300 vehicles per day, and Division Street with 1,910 vehicles per day.

Significant traffic count and pattern changes since the 1989 counts are primarily due to commercial development changes east of town. This has resulted in decreased traffic counts in the southwest area of Decorah, although the Short Street corridor traffic has continued to grow. Traffic east of Montgomery Street has approximately doubled over this period.

3.5 Streets

Chapter 306 of the Code of Iowa provides for the functional classification of all highways, roads, and streets in the state into categories according to the character of service they provide. The classification of streets and roads in each county is periodically updated to be current with city boundary changes and the function of the streets. The classification system serves as a basis for determining future priorities, funds distribution, and jurisdiction over various highways, roads, and streets in the state.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) also has a classification system which is similar to the state functional classification system. In addition, the U.S. DOT has established a classification of roads that are part of the Federal-Aid Eligible System. This system identifies routes qualified for financial aid allocated for improving that system.

The City of Decorah has 50.3 miles of surfaced streets open to traffic and approximately 2 additional miles of platted streets not open to traffic. 30.3 miles of surfaced streets are asphalt or asphalt over concrete. 17.4 miles of streets are concrete and the remainder are crushed rock, seal coat, or brick.

The pavement width of the streets in Decorah varies from 24 feet to 65 feet. Water Street in the central business district has a 46-foot pavement width. The predominant pavement width is in the range of 31 feet to 36 feet.

The original street system, which developed in a grid pattern, has predominantly 66-foot right-of-way. Broadway Street has an 80-foot right-of-way. The right-of-way width in west Decorah is predominantly 75 feet. Mechanic Street has a 66-foot right-of-way. Montgomery Street and Short Street have 66-foot and wider right-of-way.

Highways 9 and 52 have considerably greater right-of-way widths than municipal streets; varying from 300 feet to over 600 feet.

The subdivisions located in the northwest and south parts of the city have street right-of-way widths of 66-feet and pavement widths of 36-feet as required by Decorah's prior subdivision ordinances. More recent developments reflect the change to 60-foot right-of-way and 31-foot streets allowed as a result of the previous planning period policy changes. The pavement on local subdivision streets typically consist of 3-inches of asphaltic concrete over 8 to 10-inches of stone base.

The age of existing street surfacing still in use varies considerably from the pre-1930 period on segments of Main Street, Broadway Street, and Mechanic Street to new streets that have been developed in the recent subdivisions. Many of the older streets are Portland cement concrete that have been overlaid with asphaltic concrete. During the 1970s and early 1980s many streets were paved with asphaltic concrete over stone base. Many of these streets are located in west Decorah, and in the southwest and northeast parts of east Decorah.

Decorah has an ongoing street improvement program of paving unpaved streets and resurfacing and replacing existing pavement in the city.

Over 95% of city streets are hard surfaced. A considerable number of street miles have been resurfaced or repaved during the previous planning period due in large part to a one cent local option sales tax adopted at the beginning of that period. Major street reconstruction during that time has included a majority of the downtown street system including Water Street and many adjoining side streets.

New streets added during the planning period include those annexed east along Highway 9, Decorah Business Park streets, and Park Street extension along with those in new developments.

The city continues to reconstruct many of the major arterial streets, as much of this system was originally state highway built in the 1920s. This will include Short Street north and south of IA Highway #9, College Drive north, Industrial Drive, and most of the remainder of Water Street. Other major streets expected to require significant reconstruction during the planning period include Heivly Street, Locust Road, Pole Line Road, and Ice Cave Road.

Table 18: Street Surfacing

Surfacing	Miles	Percent
Portland Cement Concrete	17.38	29.72%
Asphalt Over Stone Base	25.46	43.54%
Portland Cement Concrete with Asphalt Overlay	5.85	10.00%
Oil and Chips over Stone Base	0.75	1.28%
Brick	0.12	0.21%
Brick with Asphalt Overlay	0.19	0.32%
Crushed Rock	0.44	0.75%
Platted, Not Open to Traffic (Undeveloped)	1.59	2.72%
State / U.S. Highways	6.7	11.46%
TOTAL	58.48	100.00%

Source: Erdman Engineering

3.6 Traffic Controls

There are 13 signaled intersections in Decorah. Seven of the traffic signals are located along Water Street in the central business district. Other signaled intersections include College Drive at Fifth Avenue and Heivly Street, and the intersections of IA Highway 9 and at Old Stage Road/Trout Run Road, and Short Street. All signaled intersections with the exception of the highway intersections are interconnected and master controlled at the Law Enforcement Center. The highway intersections may also eventually be interconnected via a Fiber Optic Network project presently under development.

Justification of traffic signals is based on the volume of traffic on major and minor streets, and also on pedestrian traffic, in accordance with provisions outlined in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). As the traffic volumes increase and traffic patterns change with future development or redevelopment of areas in Decorah, additional signalization of street intersections may be required. Currently intersection congestion and accident histories do not appear to support additional signals. The intersection of College Drive at Locust Road may be the eventual exception to this.

Most of the other street intersections in Decorah are controlled by two-way or four-way stop and yield signs. Traffic control with stop signs generally provides for traffic movement along the principal streets leading to the central business district. The installation of traffic signs is based on design criteria established in the MUTCD.

Street signage is currently under review and inventory updating per new Federal signage mandates which are to be implemented from 2012 thru 2015.

Street Department

The City of Decorah Street Department is responsible for 58.48 miles of streets (see Table 17) and 7.2 miles of alleys, as well as many parking lots in the downtown area. The Street Department is located at 108 Railroad Avenue, and the duties of the streets department are listed below.

Duties of the Street Department

- Repair minor street damage and pot holes
- Repair and replace curbing
- Maintain ditches in right-of-way
- Install and maintain all city street signs and pavement markings
- Clean streets with a street sweeper
- Maintain storm water intakes
- Maintain Dry Run Flood Control Project-including mowing, removing encroaching vegetation, and removing excessive sediment buildup
- Discharge interior ponding waters during periods of high river stages
- Clean-up and remove storm damage to trees
- Operate the Yard Waste Site - including recycling yard waste into compost and processing brush and small tree limbs into wood chips for use by anyone

Street Department's Major Equipment:

- Two Motor Graders
- Two End Loaders
- Single Axle Dump Trucks
- Tractor and Disc Mower
- Street Sweeper
- Brush Chipper
- Bucket Truck
- ½ Ton Pickups
- Spray Patcher
- Snow Blower
- 12" Tractor-Driven Flood Pumps

3.7 Modes of Transportation

Railroad

Although there are no railroads in the City of Decorah, The Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern (DM&E) Rail Line serves the southern portion of Winneshiek County. This cargo train passes through the towns of Castalia, Ossian, Calmar, Fort Atkinson and Jackson Junction. There is no passenger train service available nearby.

Air Transportation

The Decorah Municipal Airport, a general utility airport which is classified as a Class B II Airport, is located southeast of the city along Highway 9. The airport is owned by the city and sits on 154 acres. The airport has one operational runway, Runway 11/29, which is 4,000 feet long by 75 feet wide and constructed of concrete. The concrete strength is 28,000 pounds single wheel loading. The runway is lighted with medium intensity runway lights (MIRL), and a runway-end identification light (REIL) at both thresholds, and has basic runway markings. There is a non-precision instrument approach on Runway 29. Other buildings at the airport include 16 rental hangars, and the airport also provides jet fuel and aviation gas for purchase and a full-time Fixed Base Operator. There are approximately 25 aircraft operations per day or 9,000 operations each year. Of this total, 55% is local general aviation and 45% is transient general aviation. The airport has 25 aircrafts based on the field, with 24 single engine planes, and one Ultralight.

<http://www.airnav.com/airport/KDEH>

Public Transportation/Mass Transit

Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation – Northeast Regional Transit (NRT) is the designated Regional Public Transit System providing transportation services to the general public in the five-county northeastern corner of Iowa. With a fleet of 52 vehicles, of which 48 vehicles are ADA handicapped accessible, NRT provides the only form of public transportation available in five of the seven counties served by NRT. The Transit is a curb-to-curb public transit service, which means the driver will pick up and drop off at curbside. Riders needing additional assistance may request door-to-door service, which means the driver will be available to assist the rider to and from the main entry door and the transit vehicle.

The City of Decorah provides \$14,000 to NRT to assist with discounting Hometown Taxi rides for any Decorah resident 60 years or older. NRT also puts \$14,000 toward this effort, bringing the total available to subsidize elderly riders in Decorah to \$28,000 each year. Hometown Taxi delivers monthly rider log sheets by category totals to NRT and NRT pays out \$1.50 per elderly ride to Hometown. In addition, another organization in Decorah, the Depot, a faith-based organization, pays NRT \$7,000.00 to assist with granting \$1.00 off any ride that Hometown gives to any person with a disability. An elderly person with a disability can only claim the elderly subsidy and not the disability subsidy.

Private Transportation

There are several private taxi companies in Decorah, including Q- King Taxi, Hometown Taxi, and Sarge and Marge Taxi. Some of these offer reduced rates for senior citizens, students and handicapped people. Service for long-distance regional travel, nights and holidays are provided through some of these companies. Hawkeye Stages is a charter bus company operating in Decorah serving tour groups.

Multi-Use Trails

The residents of the Decorah area are fortunate to have access to a growing network of recreational trails, as is shown in Figure 5. Currently, there are 12 miles of paved trails and 15 miles of off-road trails, which were host to the first mountain bike race in the state of Iowa. Decorah is in the process of finishing the extension of the Trout Run Trail, which forms a circular scenic path around the City of Decorah.

Decorah has a fairly extensive sidewalk system that has been maintained and improved through a series of public and private activities. These include a property owner notification program for maintenance requirements, city cost sharing considerations for needs beyond the nominally required widths and parameters, conversion to current ADA standards for crosswalks in construction projects, and the addition of walks in previously unserved areas. The long range objective is to provide consistent sidewalk facilities throughout the city to the extent possible.

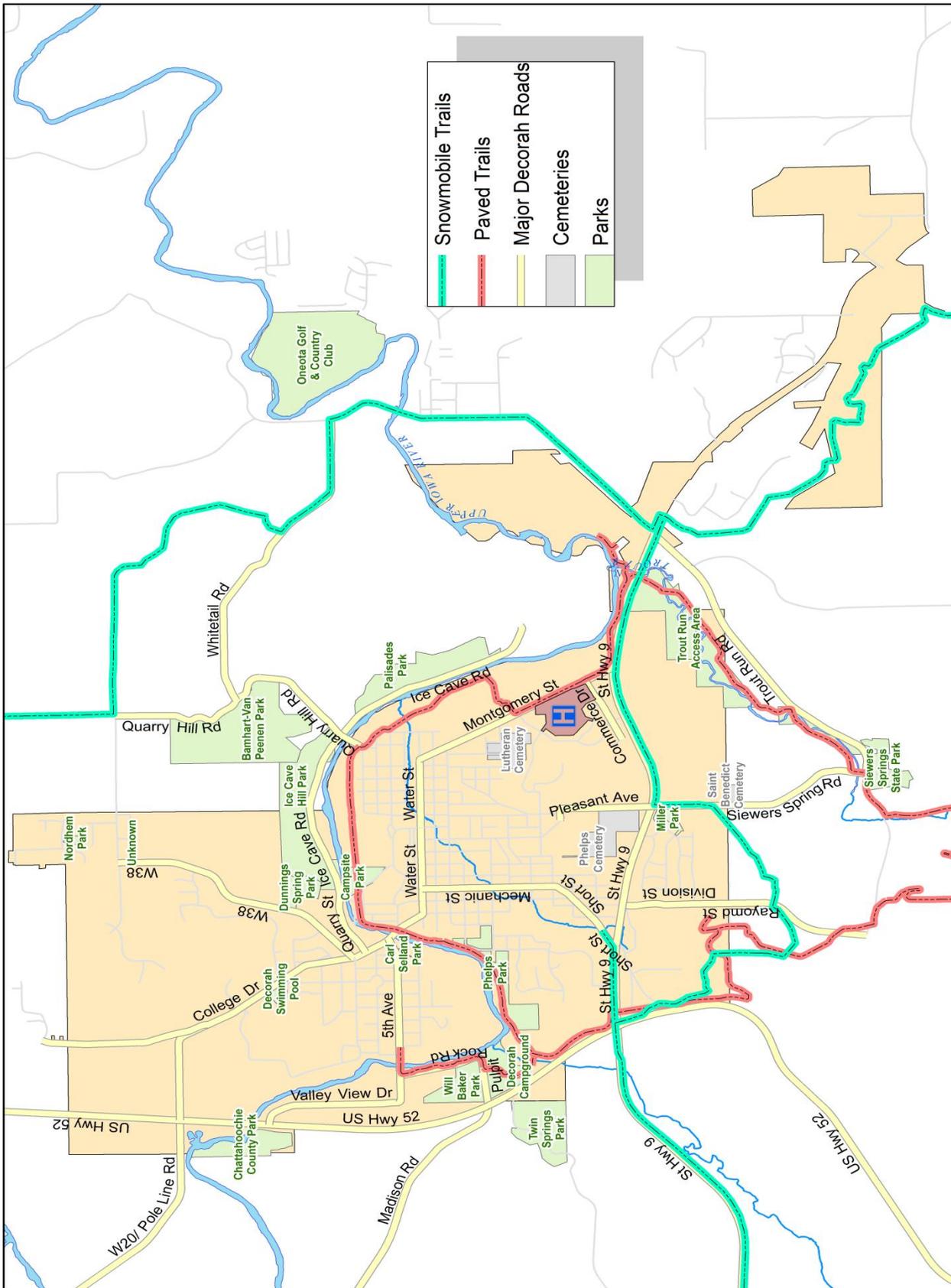
Since the previous planning period a considerable change has occurred in regard to recreational trail facilities. Prior to this the city did have some bicycle-oriented facilities in paths along College Drive from the bridge to the swimming pool and along Montgomery Street. An initial independent recreational trail was constructed along Oneota Drive (Dug Road) and the Upper Iowa River north of downtown to Wold Park in the 1990's. This facility was a two mile 8-foot wide asphalt path that is presently being expanded into an 11 mile paved loop around the south half of the Decorah area.

The final portions of the loop are expected to be constructed in 2011-2012. Along with this are extensive trail links to other destinations such as the campground and college (Fifth Avenue) and the eastern commercial district (Walmart area). A second step in encouraging utilization of the trail will be the networking of sidewalk access links. These have already begun or are in the planning stage in areas such as the high school and downtown.

There is potential and interest in expansion of the system to include Freeport area access, Prairie Farmer Trail access, expanded Luther area access, and additional facilities including a possible trail head.

In addition to the paved trails, an extensive off-road unpaved trail system has also been developed in the Van Peenen Park and surrounding areas.

Figure 5: Recreational Trails & Landings



Recreational Trails & Landings

3.8 Summary of Existing Transportation Plans

State, regional, and county agencies have developed guidance and improvement schedules for roadways and infrastructure under their responsibility. It is important that the City of Decorah and these agencies continue to communicate on proposed implementation schedules and coordinate local and regional activities. State, regional, and county plans are identified below.

20 Year Regional Transportation Development Plan

The Transportation Development Plan represents a 20 year plan to encourage and promote the development of transportation systems embracing various modes of transportation in a manner that will serve communities and counties in our region as well as the entire state efficiently and effectively.

Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a four-year financial program that describes the schedule for obligating federal funds to state and local projects which are identified by local communities and counties. The TIP contains funding information for all modes of transportation including highways and High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) as well as transit capital and operating costs. State, regional and local transportation agencies update the program each year to reflect priority projects in the Constrained Long-Range Plan (CLRP).

State of Iowa Transportation Plan

The State develops a long-range statewide transportation plan, with a minimum 20-year forecast period at the time of adoption, which provides for the development and implementation of the multimodal transportation system for the State.

3.9 Transportation Summary

The City of Decorah's recreational trail system is above average and is an asset to the community. In general the transportation system is adequate and serves the needs of the community. One area with room for improvement is increased public transportation. Like almost all communities, maintenance and repair of the transportation infrastructure is a priority and requires the most resources.

3.10 Transportation Policies

- The major street plan should be maintained in a way that is integrated with the regional street system and reflects major traffic generators and adjacent land-use patterns.
- Standards for major and local streets should be developed and enforced in the subdivision ordinance and city standard specifications to insure adequate right-of-way, pavement width, street access, and dedication of street right-of-way prior to development. Statewide Urban Design and specifications (SUDAS) guidelines should be considered for planning and construction.
- Provision of frontage drives and limited access along Highways 9 and 52 that provide for adequate traffic control and land-use development should be encouraged.
- Residential areas and residential local service streets should be protected from the impact of industrial traffic by enforcement of truck routes in the city, to the greatest extent possible.
- The street improvement program priorities should generally be based on existing and future traffic volumes based on land use projections and street maintenance evaluations.
- Alternative traffic routes between the outlying areas and the city should be considered as traffic volumes warrant.
- Various options regarding mass transit to serve Decorah should be explored, including the development of a regional transportation center.
- Continued improvements and development at the Decorah Municipal Airport should be in accordance with an updated airport master plan. The development of a regional airport should be considered.
- Use of the airport by commuter aircraft should be promoted.
- Streets should be planned with consideration for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. This should include new development as well as street redevelopment.
- Access Management for major streets should be encouraged and implemented and utilize SUDAS guidelines as a reference for new and existing streets.