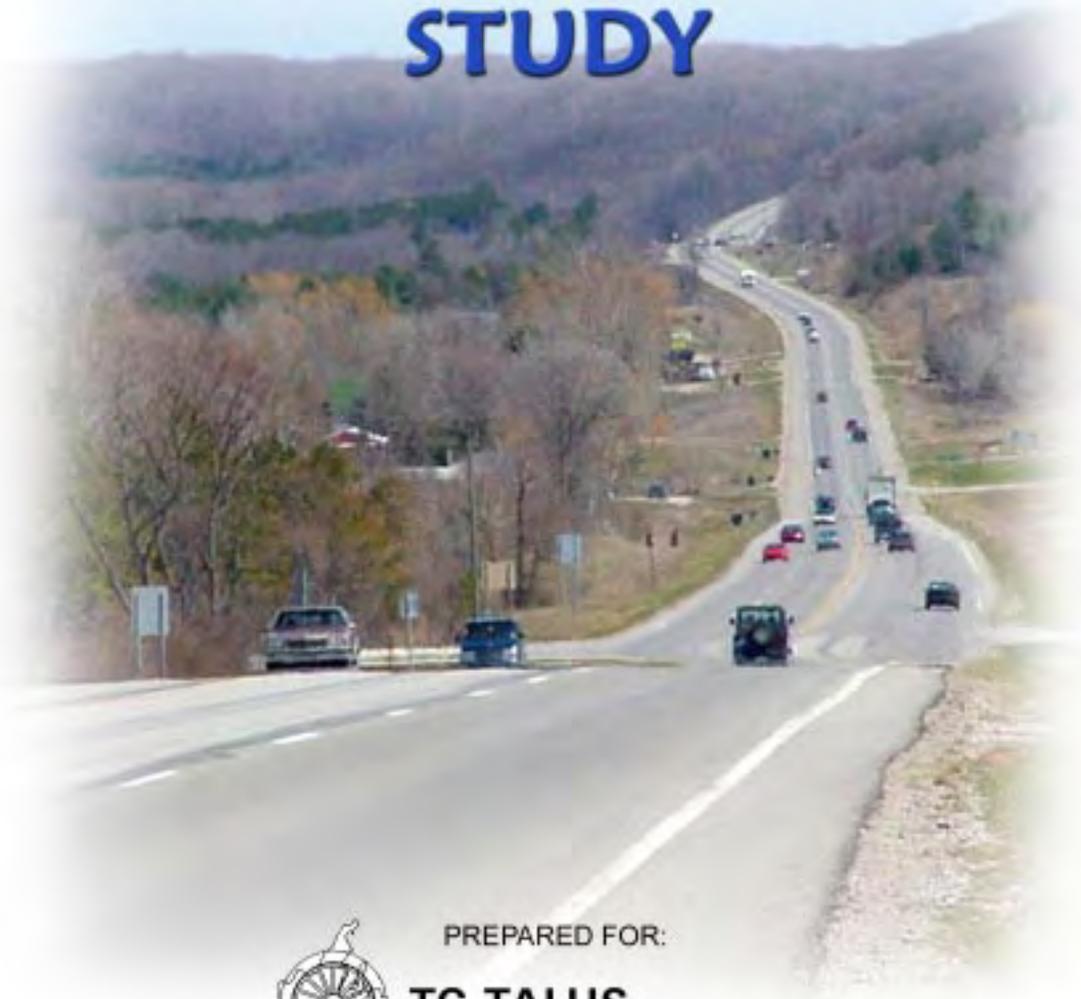


M-72 CORRIDOR STUDY



PREPARED FOR:

TC TALUS

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Clearwater Township
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TC-Talus**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State highway M-72 is the main gateway to the Grand Traverse area from the east. It is a major route for commerce and commuters, as well as tourist traffic. The highway corridor is coming under increasing development pressures, and is in danger of losing much of its aesthetic appeal through inappropriate development.

In the spring of 2001, a citizen-led grassroots effort was undertaken to raise local funds for a study of the M-72 corridor between Acme and Kalkaska. Funding was obtained from a number of local government agencies and a matching grant from Rotary Charities, and R. Clark Associates, Inc. was contracted to conduct the study. The primary focus of the study was to look at the aesthetic aspects of the corridor and the possible effects of unregulated development.

The existing development conditions along the corridor were looked at, as well as natural features such as forest cover, wetlands, lakes and streams, and topography. Through visual and photographic analysis, coordinated with topographic maps, the major viewsheds along the corridor were mapped for each direction of travel on the highway. This mapping illustrates those areas where inappropriate development would likely have the most detrimental effect on the aesthetics of the corridor.

An investigation was conducted of the current zoning regulations of the four townships in the study area, followed by an analysis of the maximum “build-out” that zoning would allow. Maps were created to illustrate some of the patterns of this potential development in the areas that are visible from the highway, and the impact of additional potential traffic on the roads intersecting M-72.

The visual impact of potential development is also illustrated with photographic examples. This was done by taking photos of existing scenes along the corridor and, using Adobe Photoshop, adding development density based on local zoning. Along with development impact, photographic examples are also included for signage, billboards, landscaping and medians.

In addition to the highway’s primary purpose of moving vehicular traffic, other forms of transportation need to be encouraged, promoted, and accommodated within the M-72 corridor. This includes making travel safe and enjoyable for bicyclists and pedestrians, as well as providing accommodations for busses and car-pooling, and exploring the potential for rail service.

Recommendations for action include consideration of scenic view easements and ridge protection overlay zones to protect the most sensitive areas, as well as purchase or transfer of development rights programs to direct growth into appropriate areas. It is also recommended that the four townships work together to coordinate their zoning ordinances with regard to such issues as signage, landscaping, billboards and communication towers.

Coordinated action by the four townships and two counties in the study area should continue in the future to review large projects that impact the corridor, and ultimately the entire Grand Traverse area. Loss of the area’s natural scenic beauty will undoubtedly have a negative economic impact on one of the region’s largest industries – tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The M-72 corridor is the main gateway to the Grand Traverse area from the east. It brings people to the area from the heavily-traveled routes of I-75 and U.S. 131. It is the first impression that many visitors have of this area. M-72 is also an important route for regional commerce, and many local residents use the highway to commute to and from work. The drive between Kalkaska and Acme features many scenic vistas and views of undeveloped woods and farmland. Portions of the corridor are currently being developed in various ways, and the pressures for further development are ever-increasing. Residents often cite the commercial strip development along M-37/U.S. 31 South, the southern gateway to the Grand Traverse region, as an example of what they don't want to see happen to other parts of the area. The purpose of this study is to provide some tools to help prevent this type of development from destroying the character of the still-lovely eastern gateway.



A. STUDY AREA

The area encompassed by this study is one mile each side of the 16.5-mile stretch of state highway M-72 from the western limits of the Village of Kalkaska to where the road intersects U.S. 31 at Acme. This part of M-72 passes through portions of two counties and four townships, and includes a number of different natural ecosystems and human land uses. In addition, there are areas within view of the roadway that extend far beyond the main two-mile-wide study corridor. These areas are included in the study because of their importance to the visual quality and scenic character of the corridor (Fig. 1).

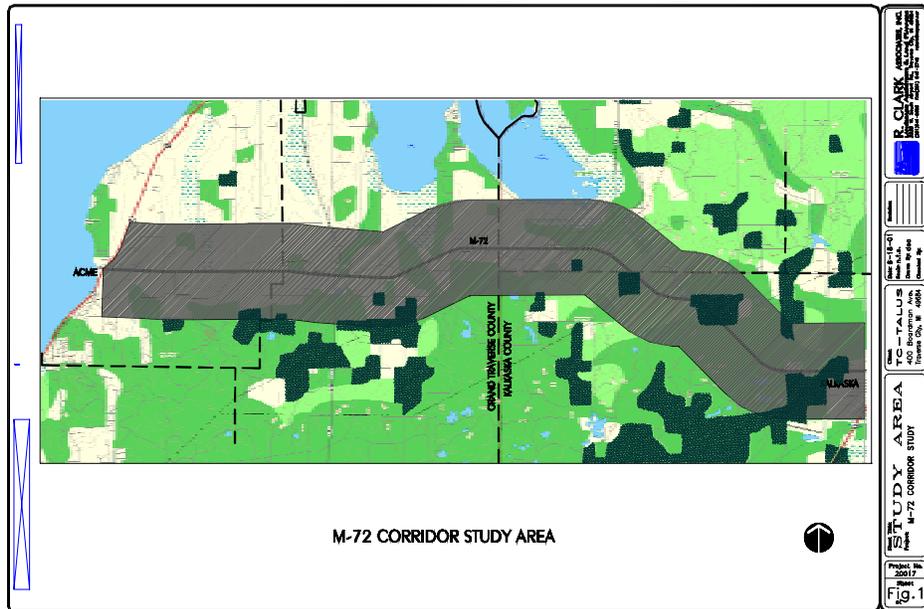


B. THE PLANNING PROCESS

This study process was initiated by a grassroots citizen effort to solicit the involvement and financial support of local units of government in a coordinated effort to determine what aspects of the corridor need protection and how to do so. With the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) planning improvements to the highway and conducting an access management study, the time seemed right to also examine the visual aspects of the corridor. The purpose is not to prevent development from happening, but to plan and manage it so that the scenic and visual character of the corridor is not destroyed by inappropriate development or inappropriately placed development. The purpose of this study is to examine and make recommendations on such issues as signage, billboards, landscaping, access, building placement and setbacks, alternative transportation opportunities, scenic views and ridge development.

Meetings were held to get feedback from the local communities on what issues were important to them in the M-72 corridor, and what aspects need study and/or protection. To present the preliminary analysis of the corridor and gather input from local communities, meetings were held in the spring of 2001 in Whitewater and Acme Townships and with the townships of Kalkaska County, as well as with the Traverse City Area Transportation and Land Use Study (TC-TALUS) Technical Committee and Board.

FIGURE 1 -- M-72 CORRIDOR STUDY AREA



The study area is one mile each side of M-72 between Kalkaska and Acme.

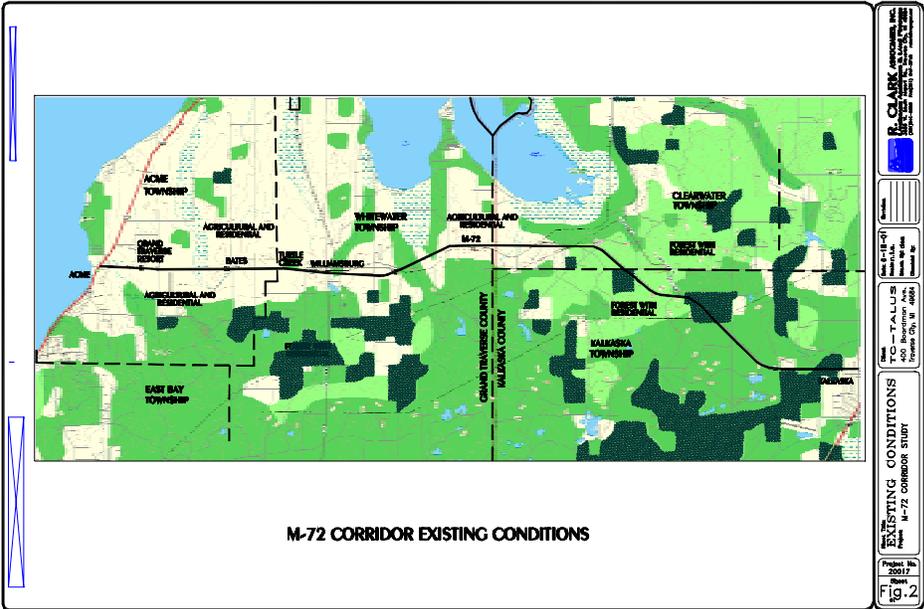
II. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The M-72 corridor contains a variety of existing land uses, including commercial and industrial developments, residential, agricultural and forested lands. Most of the existing development is currently located in the western end of the corridor, closer to Traverse City, with the eastern end being predominately forest and farmland. Much of the land bordering the highway at the eastern end of the study area is State Forest land. The central portion of the corridor is mostly farmland, with scattered single-family residential development. Commercial development nodes occur just east of Williamsburg and at Acme, with scattered commercial facilities at other locations. Industrial uses occur at the western edge of Williamsburg and in the Bates Road area. Between Williamsburg and Bates Road is the Turtle Creek Casino, owned and operated by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians.



At the western end of the study area, the highway is bordered on the north by the Grand Traverse Resort, with uses including golf course, residential and commercial. On the south side of the highway, agricultural uses give way to commercial development near the intersection with U.S. 31. Figure 2 illustrates in general some of the existing conditions along the corridor.

FIGURE 2 -- M-72 CORRIDOR EXISTING CONDITIONS



Some of the existing development and character along the corridor.

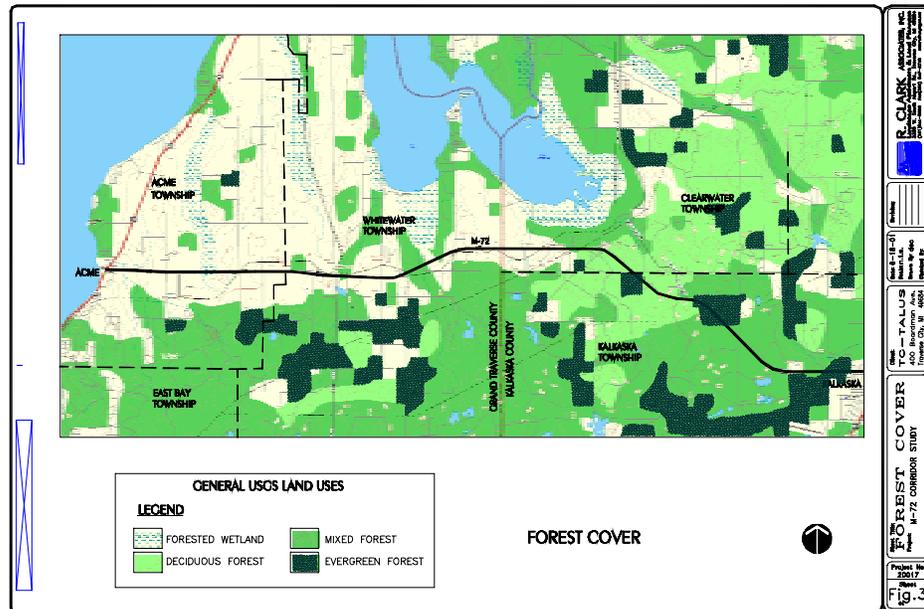
A. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

1. FOREST COVER

The eastern end of the corridor is heavily forested with a mixture of hardwoods and evergreens. As previously mentioned, much of this land is in State Forest ownership. Large blocks of red pine plantations are mixed in with areas of deciduous and mixed forest. As one travels farther west, the solid forest cover gives way to more open pasture and agricultural land. Scattered stands of hardwoods and blocks of pines are present, with heavier forest cover occurring in the stream valleys. In areas where the forest cover does not extend to the highway, the views generally include forested hills and ridges in the distance. The existing tree cover is a very important component of the scenic character of the corridor. Measures should be implemented to prevent the unnecessary degradation of this resource. The existing forest cover as mapped by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) is shown in [Figure 3](#).



FIGURE 3 -- FOREST COVER



United States Geological Survey inventory of existing forest cover.

2. WETLANDS

The M-72 highway crosses a number of wetland systems between Acme and Kalkaska. These are located in the valleys and are associated with the streams that feed into Skegemog and Elk Lakes and the East Arm of Grand Traverse Bay. These areas are very important for wildlife habitat and to maintain water quality, and should continue to be protected. Extensive wetland areas that are undeveloped also help to preserve the natural character of the corridor. Particularly around the southeast end of Skegemog Lake, the wetlands and public ownership will help to prevent one of the most scenic views in northern Michigan from being destroyed by inappropriate development. [Figure 4](#) shows the existing wetland areas.

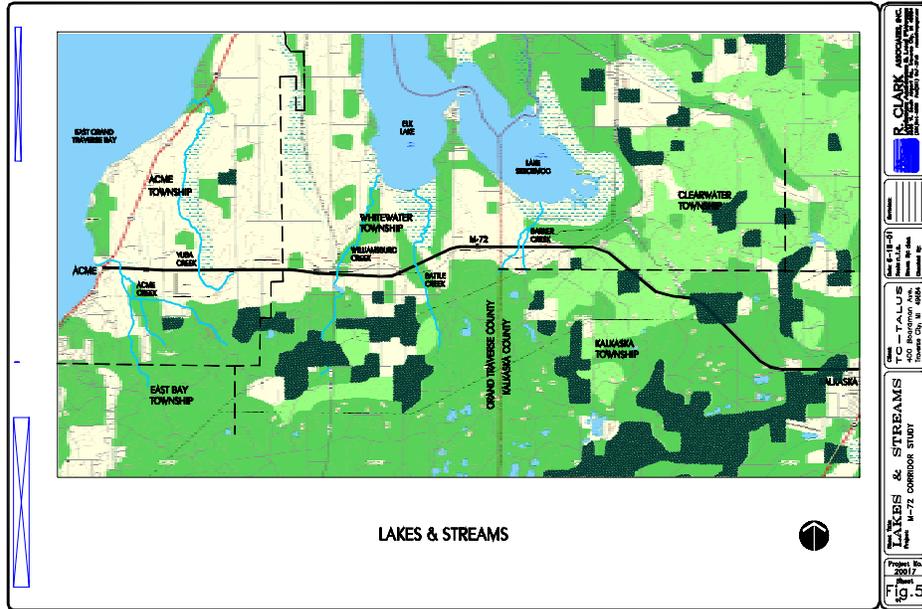


3. LAKES & STREAMS

The highway crosses several streams (Fig. 5). Traveling east to west, these are: Barker Creek, Battle Creek, Williamsburg Creek, Yuba Creek and Acme Creek. Efforts should be made to maintain high water quality by preventing erosion and sedimentation, particularly at the highway stream crossings. There are no lakes immediately adjacent to the highway, but the most dramatic view along the route takes in a view of Skegemog and Elk Lakes, and the western end of the route includes views of East Grand Traverse Bay.



FIGURE 5 -- LAKES AND STREAMS



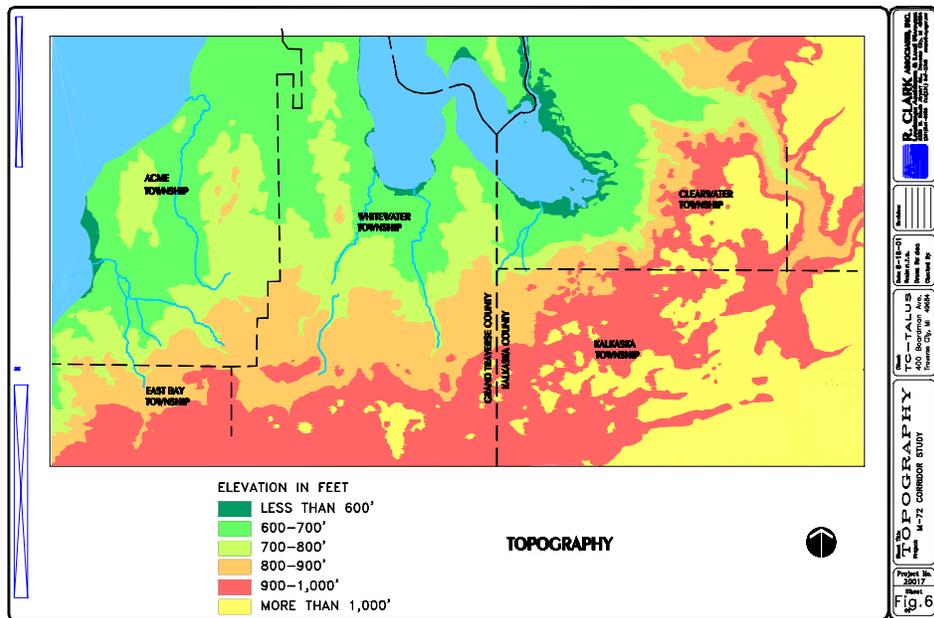
The highway crosses several streams and has views of Lake Skegemog, Elk Lake and Grand Traverse Bay.

4. TOPOGRAPHY

Traveling west from Kalkaska, the highway traverses a generally level and gently rolling plateau until it enters Clearwater Township. Shortly after crossing the township line, the road descends sharply into the valley of Barker Creek. Some of the most dramatic views along the corridor occur from this hill, looking northwest to Skegemog and Elk Lakes and west across the valley. One of the best views in the eastbound direction is from the west side of Barker Creek, looking east across this same valley to the hills in Clearwater Township. The highway continues westward, crossing a series of ridges and creek valleys. The ridge tops provide open views of the surrounding countryside, while the valleys are generally more wooded and enclosed. Toward the western end of the corridor, the terrain levels out somewhat before descending gradually to East Grand Traverse Bay. [Figure 6](#) illustrates general topography of the area.



FIGURE 6 -- TOPOGRAPHY



The highway drops more than 400 feet from Kalkaska to Acme, allowing for many unique views of the area's natural resources.

5. MAJOR VIEWSHEDS

Among the major features of the M-72 corridor between Kalkaska and Acme are the views and vistas one encounters along the way, and the changing nature of the visual experience.

The forest cover on the eastern end of the corridor comes relatively close to the highway, limiting the views to woods at close range. Farther west the land becomes more agricultural and open, with many locations providing expansive views of the surrounding countryside. In most of the valleys where the highway crosses creeks, the tree cover comes in close to the road and limits the views.

The primary viewsheds for each direction of travel were mapped, photographed and analyzed. These are shown in Figures 7 & 8.

Dashed lines indicate the major ridge lines within and adjacent to the highway corridor.

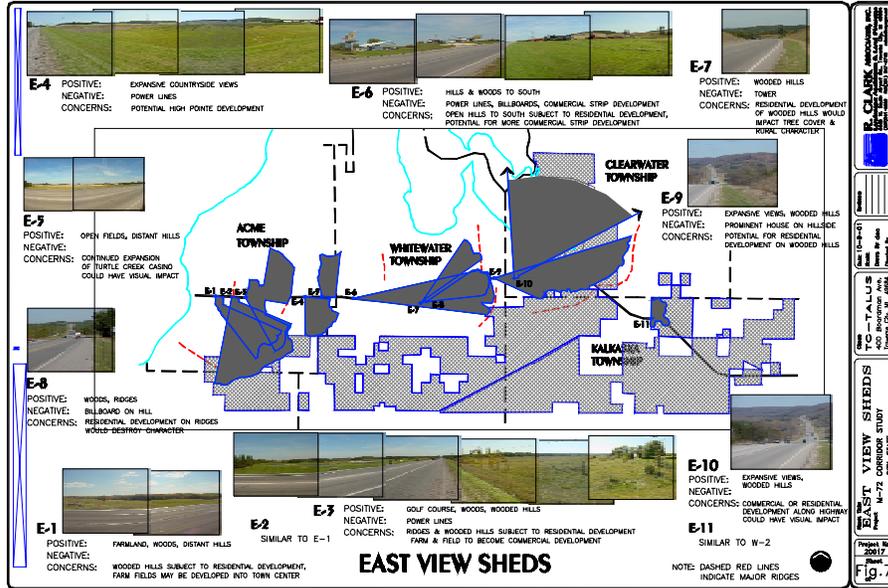
Also shown on these maps is land that is in public ownership. This is mostly State Forest property, but also includes some county and township properties, as well as some public school property on the corner of M-72 and Rapid City Road. These publicly-owned lands are less likely to be developed than private properties, and were less of a concern in this study.

Several things become apparent from this mapping:

- Many of the viewsheds cover significant areas and large distances.
- Many of the viewsheds overlap, with the same areas visible from more than one vantage point and from both directions of travel.
- In most cases, the ridges define the limits, and are the primary feature, of the viewsheds. Inappropriate or excessive development of the ridge tops could have a serious detrimental effect on the scenic quality of the corridor.

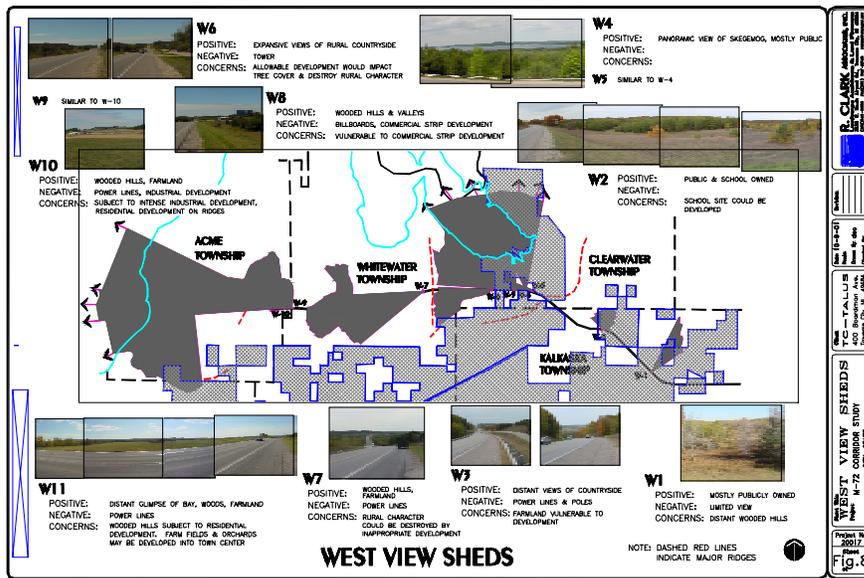
There currently exists one scenic turnoff area, at view W4 overlooking Skegemog Lake. There may be other locations along the corridor where a scenic turnoff would be appropriate. Two possibilities might be at view W11, just west of Lautner Road, with a view of East Grand Traverse Bay and the Holiday Hills area of East Bay Township, and at view E9 near Baggs Road, for a view across the Barker Creek valley to the hills of Clearwater Township. While adding scenic view turnoffs would allow travelers the opportunity to stop and enjoy the view, they would also require maintenance and add one or more driveway access points to M-72. This may prove to be undesirable when MDOT is in the process of attempting to minimize access points and traffic conflicts.

FIGURE 7 -- EAST VIEW SHEDS



The major view sheds when traveling east from Acme to Kalkaska.

FIGURE 8 -- WEST VIEW SHEDS



The major view sheds when traveling east from Kalkaska to Acme.

III. GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

A. STATUS OF PLANNING & ZONING

Reviews were conducted of the zoning ordinances and master plans for Acme, Whitewater, and Clearwater townships. Kalkaska Township doesn't have its own zoning ordinance and uses the ordinance of Kalkaska County.

The following chart illustrates which of the townships have controls in place to regulate some of the issues that will be of increasing concern as the corridor continues to develop.

TOWNSHIP	SIGNS	BILLBOARDS	LANDSCAPING	TOWERS	ACCESS
ACME	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WHITEWATER	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CLEARWATER				✓	
KALKASKA				✓	

A number of different zoning districts currently exist within the M-72 corridor, with each of the four townships having different regulations for each of the districts within its jurisdiction. Table 1 shows a comparison of the regulations for the relevant zoning districts of each township within the corridor.

The maps in [Figures 9 through 12](#) show the zoning districts in each township as they relate to the M-72 corridor and the areas within the viewsheds.

B. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

The impacts of unregulated development, as well as the benefits of a protected corridor, extend far beyond jurisdictional boundaries. As one of the main gateways into the Grand Traverse area, the appearance and natural character of the M-72 corridor is very important to one of the largest sectors of the local economy: tourism. If a visitor's first impression of the area is one of natural beauty and scenic splendor, they will be more likely to come back again. If their first impression is of strip commercial development and hillsides covered with houses, they may be inclined to spend their vacation time and dollars elsewhere. Just as this study was the result of local governments working together for a common cause, it will take a coordinated effort by all the parties involved to carry the process through to implementation of policies that will protect this important scenic and economic resource. A regional approach to land use management along the corridor should be implemented. The four townships within the study area, with assistance from the two counties and other local agencies, should begin a coordinated effort to modify their Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances to include provisions that will protect key areas within the corridor from inappropriate development. This could include such things as implementing overlay zoning districts with clustering provisions, vegetation management and perhaps building placement and color limitations.

TABLE 1 -- MINIMUM LAND REQUIREMENTS

M-72 CORRIDOR

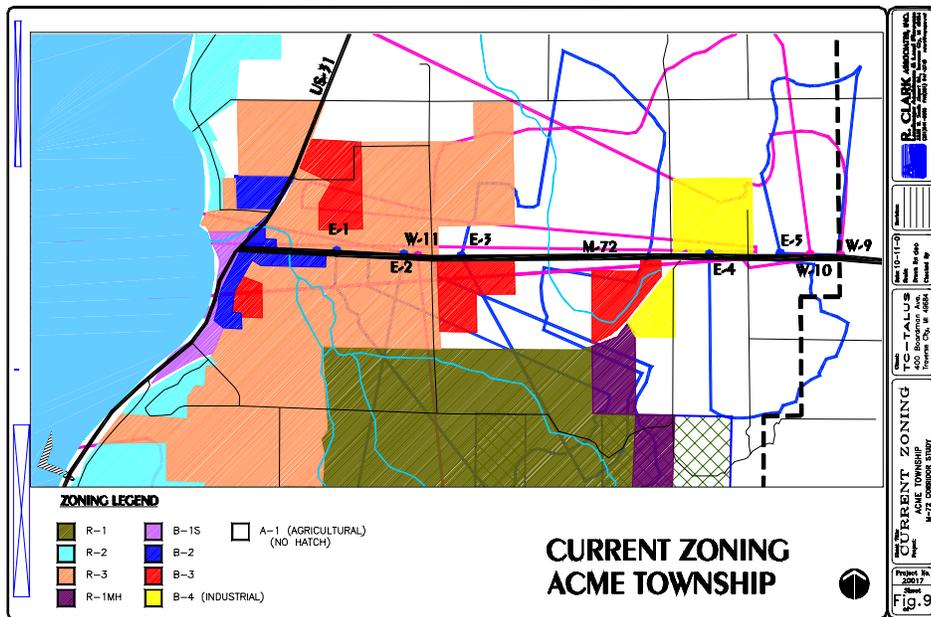
ACME TOWNSHIP	MINIMUM LOT SIZE	LOT WIDTH
(R-1) One-family Forest & Coastal Zone	1 acre	150 ft.
(R-2) One-family Urban Residential	20,000 square ft.	100 ft.
(R-3) One-family Urban Residential (with public sewer)	15,000 square ft.	100 ft.
(R-3) Urban Duplex	20,000 square ft.	150 ft.
(R-3) Urban Duplex (with public sewer)	15,000 square ft.	150 ft.
(R-3) Multiple-family Urban Residential (with public sewer)	15,000 square ft.	Varies from 140 - 250 ft.
(R-1MH) Mobile Homes	5,000 square ft.	50 ft.
(B-1S) Shoreland Business/One and Two Family Residential	15,000 square ft.	100 ft.
(B-1S) Shoreland Business/Multiple-Family Residential	Varies	100 ft.
(B-1S) Shoreland Business/Business Uses	N/A	100 ft.
(B-1P) Professional Office	15,000 square ft.	150 ft.
(B-2) General Business	10,500 square ft.	100 ft.
(B-3) Planned Shopping Center	N/A	N/A
(B-4) Material Processing & Warehousing	N/A	150 ft.
(A-1) Agricultural	5 acres	330 ft.

CLEARWATER TOWNSHIP	MINIMUM LOT SIZE	LOT WIDTH
Residential	15,000 square ft.	100 ft.
Agricultural	5 acres	150 ft.
Recreational	5 acres	150 ft.
Commercial	15,000 square ft.	100 ft.
Industrial	1 acre	150 ft.

WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP	MINIMUM LOT SIZE	LOT WIDTH
(R-1) Single Family	20,000 square ft.	100 ft.
(R-2) Single Family	12,000 square ft.	100 ft.
(R-2) Two Family	22,000 square ft.	120 ft.
(R-3) Single Family	12,000 square ft.	100 ft.
(R-3) Multi-Family	11,000 square ft. per dwelling	120 ft.
(A-1) Agricultural	40,000 square ft.	200 ft.
(RC-1) Recreational	5 acres	300 ft.
(C-1) Retail Commercial	N/A	100 ft.
(N) Industrial	N/A	100 ft.
Frontage on Boardman River and tributaries	N/A	200 ft.
Enclosures/structures for live stock, domestic animals (except pets)	2-1/2 acres	N/A
M-72 in C-1, R-3 and N	N/A	100 ft.

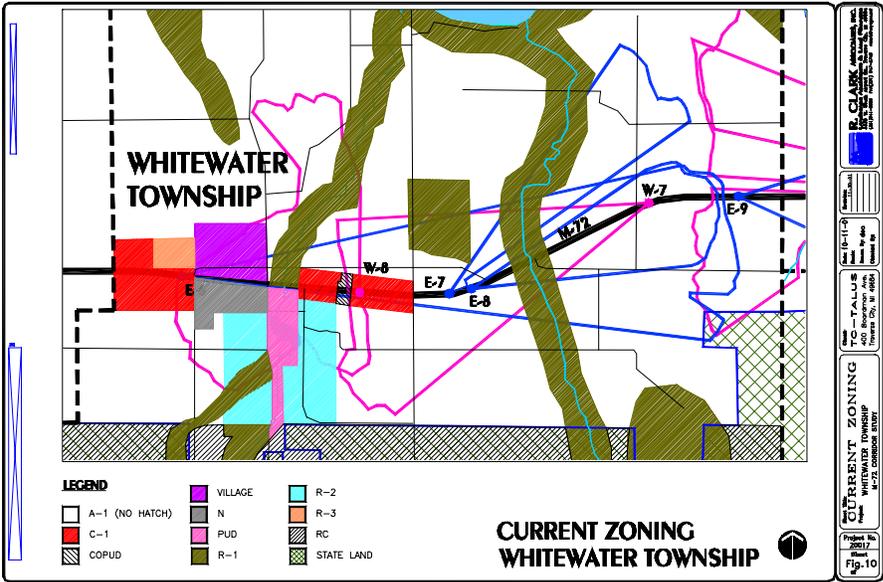
KALKASKA COUNTY	MINIMUM LOT SIZE	LOT WIDTH
(R) Residential	12,000 square ft.	65 ft.
(R-R) Resort-Residential	12,000 square ft.	65 ft.
(A-R) Agricultural-Residential	1 acre	150 ft.
(F-R) Forest Recreational	1 acre	150 ft.
(C) Commercial	N/A	65 ft.
(I) Industrial	1 acre	150 ft.
Waterfront Lots	20,000 square ft.	100 ft.
Mobile Home Parks	10 acres	300 ft.

FIGURE 9 - ZONING ACME TOWNSHIP



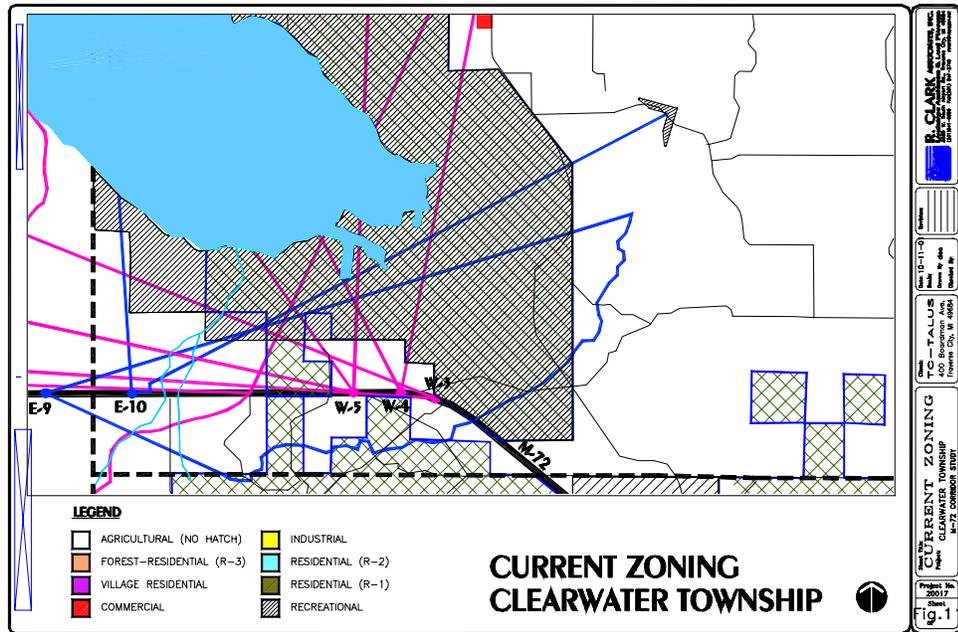
View sheds for both directions overlaid on the current zoning for Acme Township.

FIGURE 10 -- CURRENT ZONING WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP



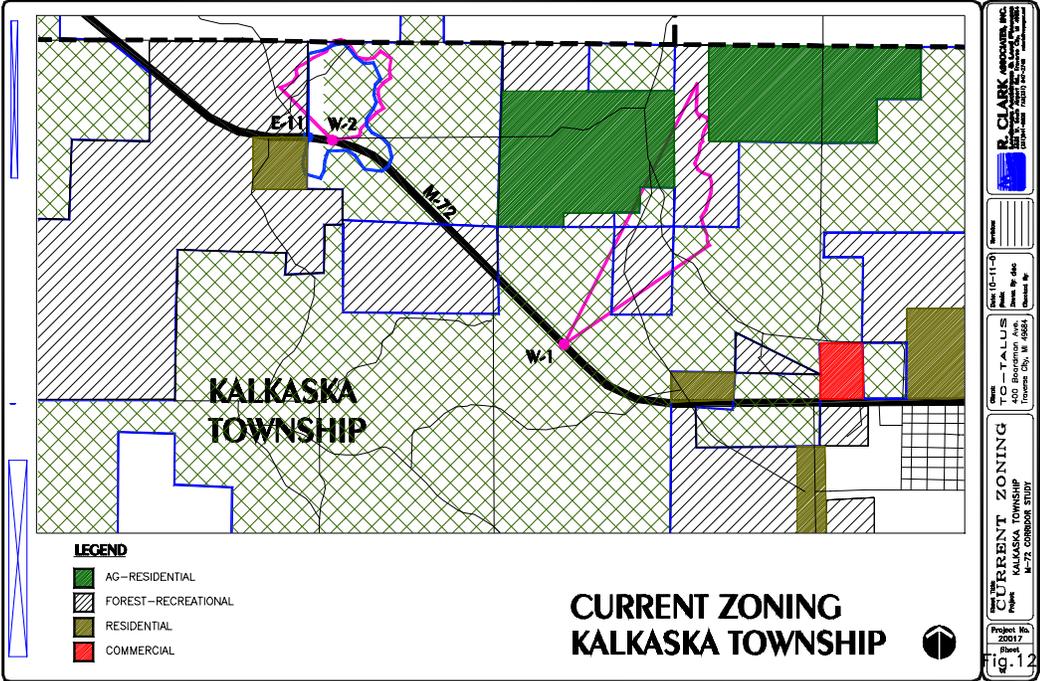
View sheds for both directions overlaid on the current zoning for Whitewater Township.

FIGURE 11 -- CURRENT ZONING CLEARWATER TOWNSHIP



View sheds for both directions overlaid on the current zoning for Clearwater Township.

FIGURE 12 -- CURRENT ZONING KALKASKA TOWNSHIP



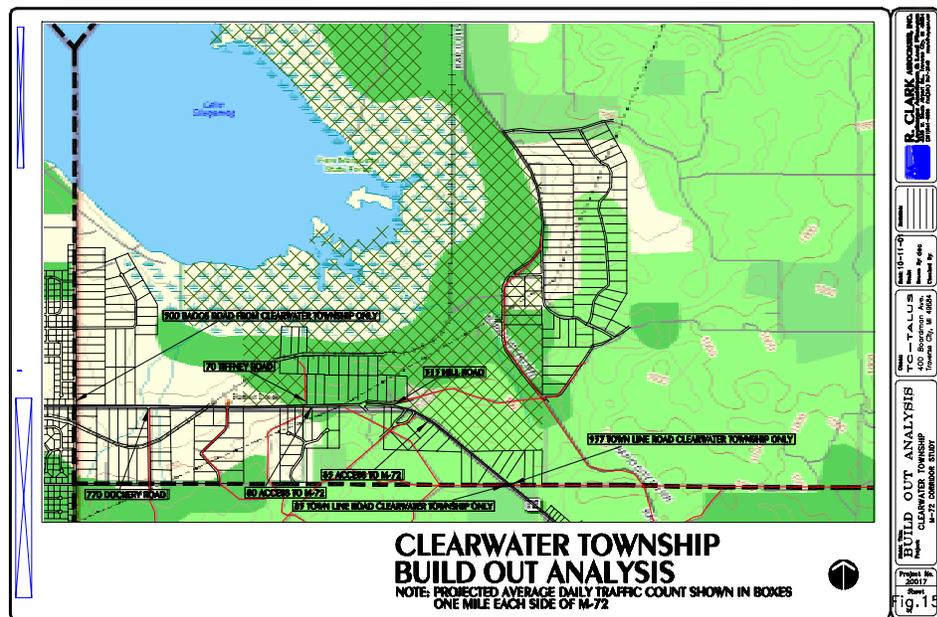
View sheds for both directions overlaid on the current zoning for Kalkaska Township.

IV. THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A. BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS

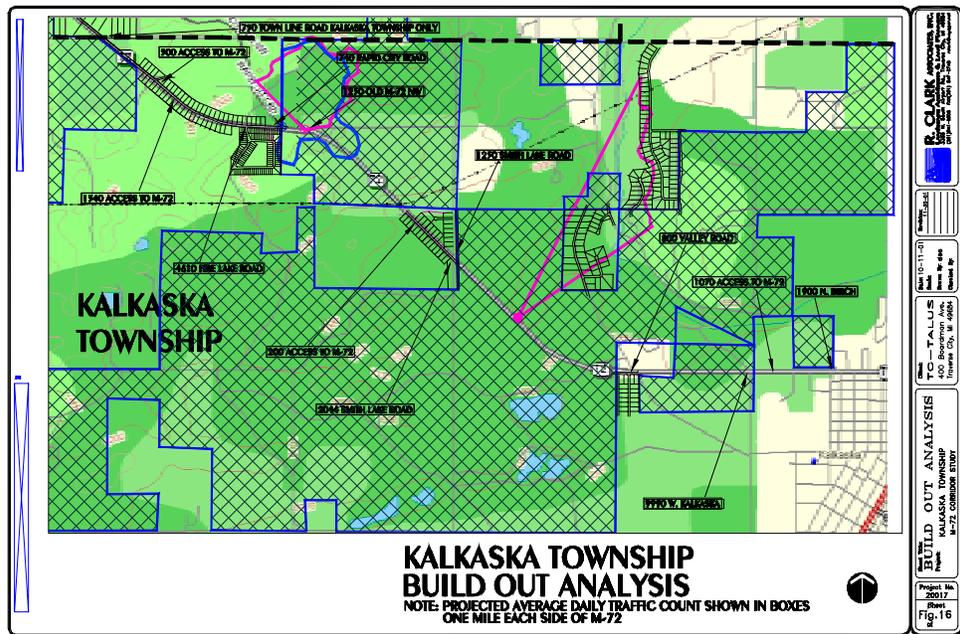
To show the impact of potential development based on current zoning regulations, a build-out analysis was conducted for the corridor. For areas visible from the highway, potential development patterns were created and illustrated on the base map. For those areas not visible from the roadway, potential development density was estimated and numbers generated to indicate additional traffic impacts on the corridor. Based on development trends in the area, it is assumed that the ridges and hilltops would likely be prime candidates for residential development. These areas provide the best views, an amenity that seems to be in great demand in this area. Because people would build on the high areas for the views, it is likely there could also be significant tree clearing to improve the view. Because these prominent ridges and hilltops are also very visible from the highway, unregulated development and tree clearing could have a serious impact on the scenic quality of the corridor. Figures 13 through 16 show the build-out analyses for each of the townships based on the zoning potential.

FIGURE 15 -- CLEARWATER TOWNSHIP BUILD OUT ANALYSIS



Potential development of areas visible from the highway, and potential traffic impacts from development of other areas, based on current township zoning.

FIGURE 16 -- KALKASKA TOWNSHIP BUILD OUT ANALYSIS



Potential development of areas visible from the highway, and potential traffic impacts from development of other areas, based on current township zoning.

B. PHOTOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES

This section contains photo illustrations showing alternative futures for the M-72 corridor. Photos were taken at various points throughout the corridor, and then enhanced with Adobe Photoshop computer software to illustrate the possible results of different levels of regulation, or no regulation at all.

1. SIGNAGE



Haphazard Collection of Business Signs



Consolidated Business Signs

2. BILLBOARDS



Existing Scene with Billboards



With Billboards Removed

2. BILLBOARDS (Continued)



Billboards Removed, Trail & Landscaping Added

3. LANDSCAPING



Existing Scene with Minimal Landscaping



With Landscape Screening, Billboard Removed, and Utilities Underground

4. RIDGE DEVELOPMENT



Existing Scene, Near Watson Road (View E-8)



**Unregulated Ridgetop Development
1-Acre Residential Lots**

4. RIDGE DEVELOPMENT (Continued)



Clustered Ridge Development with Tree Preservation

4. RIDGE DEVELOPMENT (Continued)



Existing -- Looking East Near Lautner Road (View E-3)



5-Acre Lot Residential Development on the Ridge

4. RIDGE DEVELOPMENT (Continued)



Existing -- Near Baggs Road Looking East (View E-9)



A Sign of Things To Come



5-Acre Lot Residential Development on Hills

5. INTENSE ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT



Existing -- Looking North Near Arnold Road (View W-10)



**Industrial Development Along Highway
5-Acre Lot Residential On Hills**

5. NARROW MEDIAN BOULEVARD



Existing -- Looking West Toward Acme (View W-11)



Narrow Median With Plantings Added

5. NARROW MEDIAN BOULEVARD (Continued)



Existing -- M-72 At Williamsburg



**M-72 At Williamsburg With Boulevards, Trail
and Pedestrian Underpass**

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Although the primary purpose of M-72 is to move vehicular traffic, other forms of transportation should be encouraged and promoted whenever possible. Striped bicycle lanes along the edges of the road would be one option, though with the high-speed traffic, this could be unsafe and uncomfortable, and may be the least desirable option.

Wherever possible, pedestrian and bicycle traffic should be separated from the vehicle traffic on the roadway. Investigation should be made into which parts, if any, of the existing railroad corridor may be available for this purpose. Pedestrian crossing of M-72, already quite difficult, is likely to get much more so with a wider road, more traffic and faster speeds. The largest potential current need for pedestrian crossings is at Williamsburg, where parts of the village are located on both the north and



south sides of the highway. Smaller potential needs exist at the extreme eastern and western ends of the corridor, at Kalkaska and Acme, where traffic is moving somewhat slower. Efforts should be made to slow traffic through the village of Williamsburg to make pedestrian crossings easier and safer. A traffic signal at Elk Lake Road and M-72 would be one way to accomplish this objective, though the volume of traffic on Elk Lake Road may not warrant a signal at this time. An alternative would be to provide a pedestrian and bicycle path under the roadway. Between Elk Lake Road and Vinton Road, near Williamsburg Creek, there is sufficient grade change to allow an underpass that would connect the two portions of the village. Potential for an underpass also exists west of Lautner Road, and would provide a linkage between the Grand Traverse Resort and the proposed Acme Town Center and TART trail.

In his book Best Development Practices, Reid Ewing makes some observations and recommendations that could apply to the portion of M-72 that passes through Williamsburg:

High-speed roads have a place in the regional transportation system, but not through the hearts of communities...Such streets act as barriers to the free movement of pedestrians and cyclists, children and seniors; they have high pedestrian and cyclist fatality rates.

Because they are incompatible with residential uses and demand deep setbacks, high-speed roads create no man's land along roadsides and/or invite commercial strip development. Roads are "abandoned" by people in deference to cars. No amount of landscaping can make them into boulevards in the true sense.

Surprisingly, such streets are not even ideal from the standpoints of highway capacity, vehicle fuel economy, and vehicle exhaust emissions. Maximum traffic flow rates are achieved at uniform speeds of 35 to 40 mph, not at higher speeds

where vehicles tend to string out. Autos are also at their most fuel-efficient and clean-burning at moderate speeds.

Thus, as they run through communities, higher-order streets should be designed for speeds of no more than 35 mph.

Higher-order streets through communities should be limited to four lanes, and when built with four, always divided by medians to help pedestrians cross safely with minimum delay.

Where state highways such as M-72 pass through other communities, for example Kalkaska, speed limits are reduced and traffic is slowed to a level that allows safe pedestrian crossings. It will be very difficult for Williamsburg to ever develop into a cohesive, functional community with a high-speed highway passing through its heart. The Whitewater Township Master plan and proposed new zoning ordinance along with the Grand Traverse County Master Plan, all recommend or encourage more development within the Williamsburg area.

Incorporating a raised median along portions of the highway would facilitate pedestrian crossing by providing a safe refuge and allowing the pedestrian to focus on one direction of traffic at a time.

Any improvements to the roadway should also take into consideration accommodations for bus drop-off and pick-up and parking areas for car-pooling.

An existing rail line runs from Traverse City to behind the Turtle Creek Casino west of Williamsburg. The Grand Traverse Dinner Train operated passenger tours on these tracks, but in the summer of 2001 this section of track was “excepted” by the Federal Railroad Administration. This designation means that freight traffic can still use the line, but the rails are not required to be maintained to the level needed to support passenger train use. These tracks should be upgraded and maintained so that passenger service can be reinstated and expanded in the future as the need increases. As the population of the region continues to grow, there may come a time when a light rail system becomes a feasible alternative for meeting some of the area’s transportation needs. The existing rail corridor could be an important part of this system, which could relieve some of the traffic congestion on M-72 and other area roadways.

B. UTILITIES

Utilities should be placed underground whenever possible, to minimize impacts on the visual quality of the corridor. New developments should be required to place utilities underground, and existing utilities should be placed underground when changes or upgrades are made.

Local communities should consider the use of sewer service areas as a means of containing future growth to those areas served or serviceable by existing infrastructure. The extension of sewer lines into undeveloped areas promotes sprawl development patterns and inflicts costs on municipalities that in most cases are not adequately covered by the resulting development.

C. SIGNAGE

Acme and Whitewater Townships have regulations in their zoning ordinances to control the size and placement of signage. Clearwater and Kalkaska Townships currently have no such provisions. The latter two townships should consider implementing such controls, and the four townships together should work to coordinate their regulations so that there is consistency throughout the corridor.

D. BILLBOARDS

Where and when it becomes possible, billboards should be phased out and removed, to improve the scenic quality of the corridor. This should also be a coordinated effort by the four townships, with possible help from other organizations, such as Scenic Michigan.

E. ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Progressive AE and Langworthy Strader LeBlanc, Inc. recently prepared an M-72 Access Management Plan for the Michigan Department of Transportation. The goal of their plan is to improve traffic operations and safety on the portion of M-72 from Grayling to Acme while maintaining reasonable access to existing and future development along the road. By regulating access to land uses, access management helps preserve the flow of traffic on the road system and can result in reduced crash rates, decreased travel time and congestion, and improved air quality, among other benefits. Among the access management recommendations in the plan are elimination of unnecessary driveways, careful placement and spacing of access drives, use of shared driveways and service drives, and use of a narrow median boulevard in some areas to control turning movements.

F. LANDSCAPE REQUIREMENTS

Requiring the planting of trees and shrubs can be an effective way to soften the appearance of development – especially commercial and industrial – along the highway corridor. Acme and Whitewater townships have such landscaping regulations in place; Clearwater and Kalkaska townships do not. While the need for such regulations in these eastern townships is currently not great, they should consider adopting landscaping regulations now, so they will be in place when the need arises. Again, the four townships should attempt to coordinate their ordinances to achieve consistency throughout the corridor. Where it is appropriate, these regulations should encourage the use of locally native plants and the preservation of existing native vegetation.

One way to promote more effective landscaping may be to conduct some demonstration planting projects throughout the corridor. Several visible locations could be selected, perhaps beyond the clear vision zones at primary intersections, to show how landscaping can add to the visual appeal of a community. Funding for such a project may be available from various granting agencies, including the federal government's TEA-21 program.

G. SCENIC VIEW EASEMENTS

Consideration should be given to acquiring easements on certain key parcels within the major viewsheds. This could be done with the assistance of local governmental and granting agencies, as well as local land conservancies. Purchase of scenic view easements could be used to limit development to certain areas or to limit the type or extent of development allowed on certain parcels. The landowner would receive monetary compensation for limiting his or her right to develop the land, and the public would benefit by having the scenic views protected. A scenic view easement was recently implemented on U.S. 31 South in Garfield Township. The easement was acquired by MDOT using Federal TEA-21 funding, and with assistance from the township and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

H. PDR & TDR PROGRAMS

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs could be used to protect key parcels within the corridor from inappropriate development. In a PDR program, development rights would be purchased from a landowner and held in perpetuity by the local government or land conservancy. This would prohibit development from taking place on that particular parcel of land and give the landowner monetary compensation for loss of the right to develop the land. A PDR program is underway in Peninsula Township, with funds from a tax millage assessment being used to purchase development rights to protect farmland. The state of Michigan has also recently implemented a program to purchase development rights of parcels of land in need of protection.

In a TDR program, development density would be transferred from one parcel to another. In areas that have been determined in need of protection (sending zones), development rights would be removed from key parcels, with some form of compensation to the landowners. These development rights would be relocated to other areas (receiving zones) where the development would be more appropriate, increasing the density where there is already infrastructure to support it, for example. There is currently no state statute that directly addresses transfer of development rights programs. Local communities should keep in contact with the state legislature and encourage them to adopt enabling legislation to allow such programs.

I. RIDGE PROTECTION OVERLAY ZONE

An overlay zone could be used to protect key ridges within the major viewsheds where inappropriate development would have the most impact on the scenic quality of the corridor. A Ridge Protection Zoning District would be overlaid on the existing zoning districts of the townships, and would supplement the regulations of the underlying districts. An overlay zone should include clearly articulated performance standards and incentives and address such issues as:

- Clustering of buildings to allow preservation of open space and minimize road construction
- Increased density as an incentive to the developer/landowner
- Tree protection provisions (minimum % of forest cover to be retained)
- Earth tone colors for buildings
- Placing buildings lower on the ridge, rather than at the very top, to minimize visual impact

Adoption of similar overlay districts by the four townships within the study area would permit consistent protection of these important natural features. A ridge protection zone would give the townships more control over preserving the scenic value of the ridges, while still allowing appropriate development. With the guidelines and expectations of the overlay district clearly defined in advance, a developer should have an easier time going through the township approval process. Density bonuses should be offered, and the approval process streamlined, as an incentive for unobtrusive ridge development.

J. TELECOMMUNICATION TOWERS

All four townships within the study area have regulations in place to control the placement of telecommunication towers. The townships should make an attempt to coordinate their ordinances for corridor-wide consistency. Tower regulations should encourage or require shared use, screening, preservation of existing vegetation, adequate setbacks from property lines, and minimal visual impact.

VI. NEXT STEPS

The preparation of this study should be just the first step in a long process of efforts to protect and preserve the scenic character of this important M-72 corridor. The recommendations offered here will take time to implement and require commitment on the part of local government officials and citizens. It is vitally important for each community's planning commission, zoning board of appeals, and elected board members to be aware of the benefits of corridor protection, their role in its implementation, and the potentially disastrous effects of doing nothing. The public must also be made aware of the importance of these efforts and the value of what could be lost. Landowners and developers should be made aware of, and encouraged to use, development methods that minimize the impact on the scenic quality of the corridor.

Several steps can be taken to implement the recommendations of this study.

1. Amend local zoning ordinances to incorporate the recommendations of the M-72 Corridor Study.
2. Continue communication and cooperation between the local units of government. This could include the coordination of local zoning ordinances for more corridor-wide consistency. This should also include coordinated site plan reviews for projects that affect the corridor, and cooperation in the implementation of ridge protection zones, scenic view easements and other measures. The M-72 Steering Committee that was formed to guide the Access Management Plan, or a similar group, should guide this effort.
3. Initiate a dialog with land and business owners to ensure that everyone understands the importance of protecting and preserving the scenic character of the corridor for the well-being of the entire region.
4. Continue communication with MDOT on the importance to local communities of incorporating a narrow median into portions of the highway wherever feasible.

Grants may be available for some of the funding, especially for cooperative, intergovernmental efforts at corridor-wide planning. Other agencies and organizations can likely provide logistical and technical assistance. Most importantly, there needs to be a coordinated, cooperative effort by all involved to protect the scenic resources that are so valuable to all. Once the natural beauty of the area has been diminished or destroyed, it can never be reclaimed. One of the most important economic industries in the Grand Traverse region is tourism. What reason will visitors have to come here if this place looks just like the place they came from?

We all understand that development will continue to occur throughout the Grand Traverse region and that the economic vitality of this region is directly linked to the existing natural resources of the area. Development will occur with or without planning guidelines. So the citizens of the Grand Traverse region are coming to the fork in the road. Choice or chance. They can accept what they get or they can choose what they want.

LIST OF RESOURCES

The M-22 Scenic Corridor: Preserving Our View From The Road
Leelanau Conservancy, Leland, MI

Shawangunk Ridge Conservation and Design Guidebook

David Church and John Myers

1993, The Catskill Center For Conservation And Development, Inc., Arkville, NY

Grand Traverse Bay Region Development Guidebook

2000, Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce, Traverse City, MI

New Designs for Growth

% Traverse City Area Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box 387

Traverse City, MI 49685

Phone: 231-947-7566

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

3860 North Long Lake Road

Traverse City, MI 49684

Phone: 231-929-7911

Federal Highway Administration, Scenic Byways Program

400 7th Street, SW HEP-10, Room 3222

Washington, DC 20590

Phone: 1-800-429-9297

Scenic America

21 Dupont Circle, NW

Washington, DC 20036

Phone: 202-833-4300

Scenic Michigan

Deborah Rohe

445 E. Mitchell Street

Petoskey, MI 49770

Phone: 231-347-1171

FAX: 231-347-1185

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