

INTRODUCTION

Region 7W is located northwest of the Twin Cities in Central Minnesota. The Region is comprised of the counties of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright. Region 7W excludes the St. Cloud Metropolitan area for purposes of the Region 7W Transportation Plan. **Figure 1** shows the Region 7W study area.

Region 7W will face challenges in the future as its population continues to grow. Outside the Twin Cities Metropolitan area, it is the fastest growing region in the State of Minnesota. Strong population, housing and business growth will continue to put pressure on the transportation network of the region. Its proximity to the Twin Cities and the location of major corridors of I-94, Highway 10 and Highway 169 impact the regional transportation system. Given limited funding for transportation improvements, the quality of the transportation system may decline in the future. This could mean an increase in congestion, more crashes and rougher roads in Region 7W.

The Region 7W Transportation Policy Board (TPB) is responsible for prioritizing federally funded projects in the four counties. Only projects using Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding are their responsibility. The TPB was formed through a joint powers agreement and consists of locally elected officials. A Transportation Advisory Council (TAC), whose membership consists of city and county engineers and transit directors, makes recommendations to the TPB.

The Region 7W Plan covers county and city roads classified as collector and above. These roads are eligible for federal STP funding through the Central Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership. Even so, there is a particular emphasis on higher classified roads such as those roads that are part of the State Trunk Highway System and the County State Aid Highway System. In addition to roads, the plan discusses rail, transit, trail, park and ride, freight, and airport systems.

The purpose of the Region 7W Long-Range Plan is to develop a long-term vision for the region and an implementation plan that can be acted upon by Region 7W jurisdictions as well as Mn/DOT. The development of the long-range plan included the following:

- Identification of demographic and economic trends
- Identification of major land use trends
- Identification of existing transportation system conditions
- Identification of transportation issues
- Development of a vision statement, goals and objectives and evaluation criteria
- Development of policy recommendations
- Development of an implementation plan

In addition to creating a long-term vision and implementation plan; the plan is intended to be a tool that can be used in order to gain support and funding for Region 7W transportation projects. The Region 7W Long-Range Plan identifies transportation priorities and provides a framework for making future transportation decisions for the time period of 2005 to 2030.