

CHAPTER 13:

TRANSPORTATION



Provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods to and through Ridgefield while promoting community character and providing for alternative transportation options

OVERVIEW

The Town's transportation system should encourage, support, and serve the current and desired future land use patterns for Ridgefield and the mobility of its residents.

Traffic in Ridgefield has increased over the decades as the Town's population became more dispersed and the local economy grew. As a result, residents have become more concerned with road capacity, congestion, and safety issues.

A number of important regional transportation studies are underway as of the writing of this Plan. It is likely that recommendations will emerge from those studies which could be incorporated into this Plan.

Road Classification

See Transportation Plan on p. 13-2. Definitions are established in Chapter 13 of the Ridgefield Code of Ordinances.

Arterial – Generally carry traffic between communities or major activity centers.

Note: Arterials are usually better able to handle higher traffic generators, with access management.

Collector – Provide intra-community traffic service and neighborhood access to arterials.

Note: Often these are less appropriate for higher traffic generators.

Local – Link individual properties with collectors and arterials.

Note: These generally are not appropriate for high traffic generators.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

TDM refers to policies or plans to reduce congestion by promoting:

- Alternative forms of transportation
- Off-peak travel
- Reduction in need to travel (e.g., work from home, mixing land uses to allow trips by foot, etc.)

In some communities, employers are encouraged or required to develop TDM plans that show how they will reduce single-occupant car trips by employees.

ROADS

Overall Circulation and Traffic

The Transportation Plan classifies Ridgefield's road network (see sidebar for description of the road classes).

The State has been widening portions of Route 7 from two to four lanes in Wilton and from Ridgefield to Danbury. Construction along this entire corridor has impacted traffic patterns in Ridgefield, as drivers look for alternative routes. When construction is completed and traffic settles into a pattern, the Town should examine new traffic counts to assess potential road capacity issues. One segment of Route 7 in Ridgefield is not currently slated to be widened. A study to analyze options for the corridor, including the non-widened section, is underway by the regional planning agencies.

Residents expressed concern about congestion and safety on Routes 7 and 35. In 2005, to help address concerns, HVCEO oversaw the preparation of the *Route 35 Driveway and Curb Cut Management Plan*. To improve traffic flow and safety, the *Plan* recommends suitable locations for new driveways and identifies where existing driveways should be moved, consolidated or closed. The *Plan* is a guide to the Planning and Zoning Commission when development or redevelopment occurs. The Town can implement some improvements outlined in the *Plan*, as funding is available. A similar plan was developed for the Route 7 corridor in 1996 and is being updated.

While these corridor plans only apply to Routes 7 and 35, principles of access management should be a consideration for all future development along arterial and collector roads.

On most roads in Ridgefield, road capacity is effectively fixed. This means that increases in traffic volume can contribute to congestion, especially in Ridgefield Center. Additional traffic can harm the character of the Center and affect local businesses. In addition, traffic circulation in parts of Ridgefield is constrained by the lack of connecting roads. This also can contribute to congestion and encourage people to seek alternate routes to avoid congestion, adversely affecting streets and neighborhoods along those routes.

To address these issues, it is important to carefully evaluate traffic impacts from new development and enhance alternative transportation options (see discussion later). The Town should continue to encourage land uses that will not significantly increase traffic in already-congested corridors. Some communities require developers to mitigate possible traffic impacts through Transportation Demand Management (TDM – see sidebar). Ridgefield may wish to incorporate TDM provisions into the zoning regulations.

Southeast, NY

Transportation Plan

Ridgefield, CT

Danbury

North Salem, NY

Lewisboro, NY

Redding

Weston

Legend

Road Classification

- Arterial
- Collector
- Local
- Desired Transit Connection
- Bus Routes
- Pedestrian Enhancement Area
- Train Station
- Railroad
- Water

4,000 Feet

New roads are not proposed in this Plan, aside from roads in new subdivisions and possibly some improved connections or road extensions in Ridgefield Center. The Planning and Zoning Commission, the town administration, and other town agencies have consistently reached consensus that the formerly proposed Super 7 Highway is not appropriate for Ridgefield. As indicated in Chapter 7, the future use for that corridor should be a greenway.

Roadway Standards

The majority of Ridgefield's roads were laid out prior to today's engineering standards. Many roads are narrow, tree-lined, winding and/or steep. These features contribute greatly to Ridgefield's character and require a careful balance between safety and roadway aesthetics when improvements are undertaken.

Ridgefield has designated a number of local scenic roads to ensure that improvements or alterations maintain the character of the roadway (see discussion in Chapter 5). Local scenic road designations are a useful tool to protect roadway character - additional roads should be designated, as warranted.

Another challenge is that new subdivision roads might be wider than the road they intersect. The Town can ensure that the design and landscaping of new intersections do not overwhelm the character of existing roads. Over the long term, the Town should review the road ordinance to determine if any of the standards should be updated to provide additional flexibility to maintain character.

Roadway Management

The Department of Public Services has managed road maintenance and improvements well over the years. As discussed in the Chapter 12, Community Services and Facilities, many towns use a computer database to help manage local roads and plan for capital improvements. Ridgefield could benefit from a pavement management system.

Ridgefield Center

Improvements are underway that should help address traffic circulation issues in Ridgefield Center. The recently adopted *Ridgefield Center Study* (see p. 9-4) recommends additional circulation improvements. The Town should continue to work with ConnDOT to implement these improvements.

Longer term, congestion could be reduced by improving options for getting to, from, and around Ridgefield Center without a car (see discussion in next section).

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Commuter rail, bus, shuttle, and paratransit services comprise public transit in Ridgefield. Paratransit provides door-to-door transportation service that is not on a fixed schedule or fixed route. It is most often provided for elderly and disabled residents.

Encouraging residents and workers to use public transit can help reduce congestion and the environmental impacts related to congestion and driving single-occupant cars. Public transit also expands mobility options for residents or workers who do not have a car or are unable to drive – an issue that might become more pronounced as Ridgefield’s population ages.

Improving and expanding public transit should be a central component of a community’s transportation plan. It is recognized that Ridgefield does not have direct control over most public transit services – regional and state entities provide public transit.

Commuter Rail Service

Passenger rail service is available from the Branchville train station to Danbury, Norwalk, Stamford, and New York City. Ridgefield residents also use stations in New York State.

There are three key strategies to encourage greater use of commuter rail service in Ridgefield:

- improving train service;
- improving access to the Branchville Station (parking availability and the ability to get there by other means); and,
- retaining train service in Branchville.

Options to improve service levels on the Danbury Branch (such as electrification, dual tracks, and other ideas) are being studied and it may be years before a selected approach is implemented. In order to maintain momentum for implementation of the improvements, it will be important for communities that benefit from the train service to actively support the program. In the interim, MetroNorth has improved service schedules. Additional interim improvements should be encouraged.

A study is underway to assess the feasibility of creating a public transit center and improving parking at the Branchville Station. Improvements would increase access to the Branchville station. Options that provide additional parking and contribute to the desired village pattern of Branchville should be explored. Options for getting to the station without driving should also be pursued, as discussed under “Bus and Shuttle Service”, below.

A new commuter rail station is proposed nearby in Redding and concerns have been expressed that this could lead to a reduction of service at the Branchville Station (or even closing). It is understood at this time that the State intends to

keep the Branchville Station in operation. The Town should continue to work with the State to ensure this commitment. Increasing ridership and making improvements at the train station can help to maintain activity at the station.

Bus and Shuttle Services

Housatonic Area Rapid Transit (HART) provides bus service in Ridgefield and the Region. In Ridgefield, service is provided on weekdays along the Route 7 corridor from Danbury to Norwalk, including a stop at the Branchville Station. Part time bus service connects Danbury to Boehringer Ingelheim. Bus service along these routes should continue and be expanded as needed.

HART runs weekday shuttle service from the Ridgefield Center area to the Katonah train station in New York. This shuttle service has proven to be popular and, as a result, a second parking area has been established. According to HART, the main factor limiting additional shuttle service is a lack of parking. The Town should continue to work with HART and the State to find additional parking areas and expand this service.

Over the long-term it is desirable to connect Ridgefield Center, the Branchville Station, and possibly other destinations with public transit. At one time, HART provided service between Ridgefield Center to the Danbury Mall, but the service was discontinued due to low ridership. Connections from Ridgefield Center to other destinations should be explored in the future, especially if such a route would support the desired land use patterns discussed in Chapters 9 through 11. If the demand is not strong enough for full bus service, shuttle service could be explored.

The SweetHART program provides weekday dial-a-ride (paratransit) service for the elderly and disabled. The program provides door-to-door service. The program should be expanded to provide more vehicles and to service more needs (residents, workers, commuters, other age groups).

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE TRAVEL

Increasing the number of trips made by foot or on bicycle can reduce traffic and promote environmental and health benefits. While a community cannot change peoples' behavior, it can increase opportunities and reduce barriers to walking and biking. Private development also plays an important role; when planning new development or redevelopment, site design should account for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Ridgefield Center is a role model for a pedestrian-friendly environment, with wide sidewalks, an attractive streetscape, and adequate separation between cars and walkways. The sidewalks add to the character and charm of Ridgefield. The sidewalk network in the Center should be maintained and expanded north toward Copps Hill. The sidewalk network in Branchville should be enhanced and expanded. These areas are identified as Pedestrian Enhancement Areas on the Transportation Plan. Areas immediately surrounding schools might also be designated as Pedestrian Enhancement areas.

In some cases, sidewalk improvements are necessary to improve handicapped accessibility. The Town should continue such upgrades.

Due to low density patterns elsewhere in Ridgefield, there are few sidewalks in outlying areas. In many areas, the narrow, tree-lined roads make it difficult to install sidewalks. In these areas, pedestrian trails might improve opportunities to walk. Pedestrian trails could be off-road paths or dirt pathways in the right-of-way along roads. Connecting destinations such as schools, recreational amenities and commercial areas with pathways should be encouraged.

Pedestrian Elements to Encourage



Wide sidewalks, attractive streetscape.



Landscaped, good separation from traffic.



Amenities — benches, informational kiosks.

Bicyclists in Ridgefield predominantly use roads, but traffic volumes and narrow or irregular road shoulders can intimidate riders. This Plan encourages safe, convenient, comfortable, and secure bicycle-riding environments and encourages bicycle transportation as an important transportation mode and recreation activity. The Parks and Recreation Department has undertaken initial work to build bike paths at the Recreation Center. These efforts should continue.

Priority consideration should be given to establishing bike trails along roads which connect higher density residential areas with centers of local activity (business areas, schools, parks, etc.). In addition, the needs of bicyclists should be considered when roads are improved.

Providing signs and marking bicycle routes can reduce conflicts and encourage more bicycle use throughout Ridgefield. In addition, greenways can accommodate bicyclists and interconnect parts of Town.

Finally, when new development or redevelopment occurs, landowners should be encouraged to include pedestrian and bicycle amenities (e.g., pedestrian connections between properties, benches, bike racks, etc.).

TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION

Whether planning for roads, train and bus service, or pedestrian and bicycle networks, many transportation decisions that affect Ridgefield are made by or funded by others. The Town should continue to work with HVCEO, Metro-North, and ConnDOT on transportation issues and improvements.

TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIES

Address Overall Circulation and Minimize Congestion

1. Continue to implement access management recommendations for Routes 7 and 35.
2. Encourage access management for development along all arterials.
3. Continue to carefully analyze potential traffic impacts of development.
4. Consider incorporating Transportation Demand Management requirements into the zoning regulations.

Evaluate Road Standards

5. Continue to designate local scenic roads, as warranted.
6. Ensure that new roads blend with existing roads.
7. Over the long term, review road design standards to determine if they should be revised to provide additional flexibility for maintaining roadway character.

Continue Roadway Maintenance

8. Consider establishing a pavement management system.

Enhance Ridgefield Center

9. Continue to implement the recommendations in the *Route 35 Traffic Improvement Plan* (see #1, above).
10. Implement the *Ridgefield Center Study*.

Improve and Expand Public Transit Services

11. Encourage the State to move forward with Danbury Branch improvements.
12. Create a public transit center and provide additional parking at the Branchville Station.
13. Work with the State to ensure that the Branchville Station continues to provide rail service.
14. Work with HART and ConnDOT to find additional parking areas to expand the HART shuttle service to Katonah.
15. Encourage additional shuttle or bus service to meet the needs of residents and workers, including service between Ridgefield Center and Branchville.
16. Explore approaches for meeting the demand for paratransit service.

Enhance Pedestrian and Bicycle Travel

17. Expand and enhance the sidewalk network in Ridgefield Center, Branchville, and the Copps Hill area.
18. Improve ADA accessibility of sidewalks.
19. Look for opportunities to connect destinations with pedestrian trails, pathways, and bikeways.
20. When roads are improved, consider the needs of bicyclists.

21. Encourage new development and redevelopment to provide pedestrian and bicycle amenities.

Continue Transportation Coordination

22. Continue to work with regional public transit providers and the State to improve the transportation network.