



West Branch Community I-75 Business Loop Plan Fact Book





The I-75 Business Loop (Loop) extends from Exit 212 to Exit 215 and spans roughly five miles through West Branch Township, the City of West Branch, and Ogemaw Township. The Loop serves as the major thoroughfare throughout each of these jurisdictions. West Branch's downtown and many of the township's primary businesses are situated along the corridor. Exit 212 and 215 serve as the main entrances to the community and support several service, retail and food businesses. In addition, the Rifle River, one of the community's most valued natural resources, bisects the corridor.

The region in which the Loop sits is generally rural, but has experienced a significant amount of development along the corridor in recent decades. Aside from the downtown, development along the Loop is a collection of contemporary buildings that are functionally designed to serve as retail and service outlets. The buildings downtown are mostly comprised of Victorian architecture, which contribute to a small town atmosphere in the city.

The development at Exit 212 targets Interstate travelers. This exit is home to the Tanger Outlet Mall, hotels, fast food restaurants, gas stations, and a few dine-in restaurants. Close to this exit are a number of large retail stores, such as, Wal-Mart and Home Depot. At the other end of the Loop, Exit 215 hosts a gas station, but has not seen the same rate of development as Exit 212.

The overall mission of this project is to provide for the appropriate development of the Loop, while assuring the preservation of cultural resources and the protection of environmental quality. Toward that end, the project focuses on achieving several inter-related goals:

- Preserve, enhance and promote the downtown's Victorian Streetscape as an integral part of the community character.

- Control sources of non-point source pollution associated with the corridor.
- Increase the number of visitors to the businesses along the Loop and not just at the exits.

These goals were developed by key project partners consisting of members from the Growth Assessment Planners (GAP), a group comprised of officials from the City of West Branch, West Branch Township and Ogemaw Township. To date, the group has met four times and is working closely with community leaders and representatives from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Ogemaw Conservation District, and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

The project is one of only four projects chosen this year for the competitive based *Partnerships for Change* program. *Partnerships for Change* provides grants of professional planning and technical assistance for the cooperative development of inter-jurisdictional land use policies and programs that contribute to the preservation of cultural and natural resources. Managed by the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), the *Partnerships for Change Program* is sponsored by the Michigan Townships Association, Michigan Municipal League, Michigan Association of Planning, and Michigan State University Extension.



Project Partners at Third Meeting
November 9, 2005

Project Description



West Branch Area Future Land Use Plan (1969)

This plan was written to guide development for the City of West Branch, Horton Township, Ogemaw Township, and West Branch Township. The Plan was written prior to the development of I-75, but recognizes the proposed freeway and the development of the Business Loop.

The future land use portion of this Plan designates the Central Business District (CBD) along Houghton, between Fifth Street and First Street in West Branch's downtown. "Highway Oriented Commercial" land use is designated at each exit, to the east of the CBD, and along the curve where M-55 joins with the Business Loop. Residential uses, including "Urban Neighborhood Units" and medium density units are designated along the remainder of the loop.

Parking for the CBD is planned to accommodate 628 vehicles. Closing Third Street, between Houghton and Wright is proposed to improve pedestrian circulation. Plans for the CBD also include:

- Minimum walking distances between parking lots and shopping areas.
- Maximum separation of pedestrian traffic from parking vehicles.
- Provision of adequate access by service traffic to the stores.
- Channel shopper traffic inward toward the center of the CBD from the parking facilities.

Rifle River Natural River Plan (1980, revised 2002)

This plan aims to protect and enhance the Rifle River in a natural state. The main objectives of the plan are to maintain the water quality, limit harmful development, appropriately plan for

development and manage recreation in relation to the river. Among other recommendations, suggestions in the plan include regulating buffers, districts, setbacks, structure design, sanitation systems, erosion and human access.



A view of the Rifle River
From Irons Park

West Branch Township Downtown Development Authority Development Plan (1990, Revised 1991 and 1992)

The downtown development area addressed by this Plan encompasses the Business Loop throughout West Branch Township. The Plan is directed at providing water service to the commercial development adjacent to the Exit 212 Interchange. Funding for this improvement, in addition to efforts that stimulate further private investments, is to be partially financed through bonds. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is planned to repay the bonds. By 2011, the DDA expects to have received \$22,777,815 in revenue through the TIF program.

Ogemaw Township Master Plan (2003-2004)

This Plan anticipates commercial growth along the Business Loop in Ogemaw Township. The DDA will help promote the new commercial growth. Water and sewer are planned along the loop, with water running along M-55 east to M-30, and sewer extending west to Ski Park Rd. and south along M-30.



Related Plans

Ogemaw County Zoning Ordinance (1997, revised 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003)

In Ogemaw Township the Business Loop is designated as a Highway Business District. The definition of a Highway Business District is described in the plan as follows:

The Highway Business District is intended to provide areas for commercial establishments which cater primarily to the needs of the motoring public. Typical uses offer accommodations and services to motorists, specialized retail outlets and commercial amusement enterprises. The requirements of this District are developed to minimize traffic hazards and interfaces with other related uses in the vicinity.

Permitted uses in the district include retail food establishments, retail businesses, restaurants, professional offices, medical offices, banks, personal service establishments, public buildings, motels, vehicle service stations, and drive-through establishments.

The minimum lot size in this district is 40,000 square feet with a width of 100 feet. The front yard setback is 50 feet, with a 20 feet setback from the ROW line for parking lots. The rear yard setback is 30 feet. There are no side yard setbacks. The height of buildings shall not exceed 30 feet (roughly two stories), and the building shall not exceed a maximum of thirty-five percent of the parcel size.

West Branch Township Master Plan (2004)

This Plan explains that the DDA is completing the plan to install water at Exit 212. A municipal water main runs along the Business Loop and connects into the City of West Branch's water system.

The future land use portion of this plan designates the southern portion of the Business Loop as Commercial/High Density Residential. The northern portion of the Business Loop is designated as Medium Density Residential.

West Branch Township Zoning Ordinance (2005)

This zoning ordinance holds a specific overlay district "to provide for the more intensive commercial activity along the Business Route I-75 corridor while still encouraging traditional small town, mixed use development in areas adjacent to the City of West Branch." The overlay district adds a special use category to the Urban Mixed Use District which allows the following permitted uses: Single, duplex, townhouse and accessory dwellings, public uses, banks, offices, retail, restaurants (w/o drive through) and planned developments.

The overlay zone allows for the following uses under special use permit and development site review approval: Adult entertainment, building supply yards, warehouses, and wholesale businesses, commercial recreation, contractors and builders establishments, commercial day care, drive through businesses, general retail



Bellacino's Restaurant
2389 I-75 Business Loop



Related Plans

and service, hotels and motels, light manufacturing, motor vehicle service operations, outdoor advertising structures, restaurants, storage facilities, theaters and planned developments.

The development standards for structures in this overlay zone are: 25,000 square feet minimum parcel size, 200 feet minimum frontage, 50 feet minimum front setback, 35 feet minimum side setback, 30 feet minimum rear setback, and 45 feet maximum height.



Downtown West Branch

City of West Branch Zoning Ordinance (1970)

The City of West Branch has three main zoning districts along the Loop in addition to a historic overlay and several parking districts. The three main zoning districts are General Business, Central Business, and Office Service.

The General Business District is designated from Glen's Market to the east side of National City, along with Fifth St. to Eight St. on the south side of the Loop, and Fifth Street to M-30 on the north side of the Loop.

General Business District principal permitted uses are shops, dance halls, bakeries, cafes, restaurants, broadcasting studios, casket and monument sales, clubs or lodges, drug stores, food stores, municipal offices, charged parking, video rental stores, and accessory build-

ings. The minimum front setback for this district is 25 feet. The maximum height of buildings in this district is 35 feet (2.5) stories.

The Central Business District is designated from National City Bank to Fifth St. The principal permitted uses in the Central Business District are retail stores, service shops, restaurants and taverns, banks, municipal offices, showrooms and accessory buildings. There is no minimum front setback for this district. The maximum height of buildings in this district is 50 feet (4 stories).

The Office Service District is designated from Eighth St. to M-30 on the south side of the Loop. The principal permitted uses in the Office Service District are banks, post offices, governmental offices, beauty parlors and barbershops, churches, home occupation, medical and dental offices, newspaper and printing facilities, professional offices, prescription pharmacies and laboratories, clubs and lodges, real estate offices and accessory buildings. The minimum front setback for this district is 25 feet. The maximum height of buildings in this district is 35 feet (2.5) stories.

The downtown area is also subject to a Historical Overlay District. The purpose of this district is to "protect and enhance the attractiveness of the City as a pristine Victorian commercial and residential town center, thereby contributing to the economic soundness of the City and the economic and social welfare of its inhabitants."

The Historic Overlay District requires that buildings planned for construction or reconstruction must be approved by the City Planning Commission and the City Designer/Architect. The approval process is designed to support the preservation of historical structures and treat historical architectural features with sensitivity.



A view of the Rifle River from the River Walk

A watershed can be defined as the area of land that drains to a particular point along a stream. Each stream has its own watershed. Topography is the key element affecting this area of land. The boundary of a watershed is defined by the highest elevations surrounding the stream, therefore, a drop of water falling outside of the boundary will drain to another watershed. However, all of Michigan's watersheds drain to the Great Lakes (excerpted from the presentation provided by the Ogemaw Conservation District to the GAP Committee on November 9, 2005)

The major watersheds in Ogemaw County are the Au Gres River Watershed, the Au Sable River Watershed, the Rifle River Watershed and the Tittabawassee River Watershed. The I-75 Business Loop primarily affects the Rifle River Watershed.

According to the Michigan Natural Feature's Inventory, the area along the Loop of the Rifle River Watershed is home to several threatened and endangered species including the bald eagle, kirtland's warbler, and the fragile prickly-pear. These species, as part of the natural ecosystem, have a stronger chance of survival if storm water is managed.

When rains fall on roadways, rooftops and parking lots, it does not soak gently into the ground. Instead, it flows down gutters, into

storm sewers and drainage ditches, and picks up pollutants as it goes. Besides affecting the quality of water in streams and rivers, this runoff can cause them to flood more quickly. (excerpted from the presentation provided by the Ogemaw Conservation District to the GAP Committee on November 9, 2005)

Since the Loop is a considerably sized impervious surface that fosters the growth of parking lots and other impervious surfaces, the Loop plays a significant role in the health of the watershed and associated wildlife. Several businesses help manage storm water through retention basins along the Loop. Another way to manage storm water is the installation of rain gardens.

Rain gardens are a landscaped arrangement of plant types that work to filter storm water pollutants before reaching bodies of water. The City of Grayling recently completed an award winning rain garden program. The Ogemaw County Conservation District has started efforts to develop a program based on the Grayling model.

This type of program may be valuable to the area since the soils along the Loop range from moderately to rapidly permeable. Planting a rain garden along the Loop will help filter storm water as it passes through soils. This will help protect the Rifle River along with the sizeable wetland near the intersection of Flowage Lake Road and the Loop.



Retention Pond
Used by a retailer along the Business Loop



Population

Based on 2000 Census figures, the overall population for Ogemaw County is 21,645. The 2004 census estimate calculates an increase of 274 people, raising the approximate number of people currently living in the county closer to 21,919. Using a linear trend calculation, Ogemaw County may increase to 31,496 by the year 2030, as shown in chart below.

The chart below also shows the latest census figures and the anticipated growth over the next 25 years for each of the jurisdictions along the Business Loop. The City of West Branch has a population of 1,926 with a growth rate of 1.01, West Branch Township has a population of 2,628 with growth rate of 1.15 and Ogemaw Township has a population of 1,118 with a growth rate of 1.25. Together, these jurisdictions have a total population of 5,672, which may increase to a population of 7,677 by the year 2030.

In addition to the population figures below it is well known that Ogemaw County is host to a number of seasonal residents each year. While the exact number of seasonal residents is unknown, the U.S. Census provides a figure on the number of seasonal housing units in the county. Using this number, 5,829, a rough estimate of the seasonal residents can be calculated by multiplying this against the county's average household size, 2.41 for a total of 14,048. The jurisdictions along the Business Loop hold about 6% (237) of the county's seasonal homes, which calculates to about 571 additional residents during the summer.

The median age for the county is 42.3. The median age for Ogemaw Township is slightly younger at 40.4. Likewise, West Branch Township's median age is 39.8. The City of West Branch has a notably younger median age of 34.7.

The ratio of males to females for the entire county is almost 1:1, which also holds true in each of the Business Loop jurisdictions.

The racial composition of the county is predominately white at 97.5%. Other races represented in the county include African American at 0.1%, American Indian and Alaska Native at 0.6%, and Asian at 0.4%. In addition, 1.2% percent of the population identifies themselves as a person of Hispanic or Latino origin.

Census statistics on educational attainment in Ogemaw County show that 75% of people 25 years and older have a high school degree and 9.6% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. Eighty-four percent of the population 25 years and older in the Business Loop jurisdictions have a high school degree and 15% have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

The percentage rate of individuals below poverty in the county is 14%. The City of West Branch also has 14% rate, West Branch Township has 9.6% rate and Ogemaw Township has a 7.5% rate. The median household income for the county is \$30,474, which is lower than the state average of \$44,667.

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030	Growth Rate
Ogemaw County	18,681	21,645	24,676	28,122	31,496	1.16
West Branch Township	2,294	2,628	2,943	3,325	3,690	1.15
Ogemaw Township	893	1,118	893	1,118	2,011	1.25
City of West Branch	1,914	1,926	1,945	1,961	1,976	1.01
Total Business Loop Jurisdictions	5,101	5,672	5,781	6,404	7,677	1.11

Greater West Branch was once home to Chipewewa Native Americans. Ogemaw Ke-Ke-To, after whom the county was named, led the tribe from 1815 to 1840. Ogemaw Ke-Ke-To was a well respected advocate of the Chipewas and was known as an eloquent speaker. Upon his death he was given honor by President James Van Buren. Images of Chief Ogemaw now appear on the county court house, map, atlas, plat book, flag and official stationery.



Mural of Ogemaw County History
Displayed at Tanger Outlet Mall

Ogemaw County was established in 1875, West Branch Township in 1881, Ogemaw Township in 1873 and then reorganized in 1913, and the City of West Branch in 1905. During this era, railways were built and lumbering and farming operations were prevalent in the area. In subsequent years, automobiles largely replaced travel by rail and lumbering waned after forest fires spread throughout the region. Farming continued and is still a significant, albeit diminishing, land use in the area.

As automobiles became increasingly popular throughout the nation, state and region, a network of road systems emerged. The Business Loop is today's manifestation of a corridor designed to serve the area's needs. The origin of the corridor becoming a business loop is traced to the 1970's (from The Michigan Highways website: <http://www.michiganhighways.org>):

1970 - The new M-76 freeway (present-day I-75) is completed from Alger in northwest Arenac Co to Cook Rd just south of West Branch. A new state trunkline alignment is constructed and assumed into the system from the end of the new freeway at Cook Rd northerly to existing M-76 southeast of West Branch. M-76 then continues via its existing routing to M-55, then west-

erly with M-55 through downtown West Branch and on toward St. Helen.

1971 - The portion of the M-76 freeway (present-day I-75) bypassing West Branch to the southwest from Cook Rd northwesterly to M-55 is completed and opened to traffic. The former route of M-76 from the freeway south of town northerly to M-55 on the east city limit, then westerly through downtown to the end of the new freeway west of the city is redesignated as BUS M-76. This BUS M-76 routing is the direct predecessor of present-day BL I-75.

1973 - The final segment of the M-76 freeway is completed from M-55 west of West Branch to M-55 south of Roscommon and the entire route of M-76 is assumed into the route of I-75, thus completing the entire length of I-75 in Michigan. Since its parent route is decommissioned, BUS M-76 is redesignated as BL I-75.

Despite the major development of the corridor, roadside structures in West Branch have maintained a historical feel from the Victorian era. These buildings are preserved through a historical zoning overlay. Some structures may even be eligible for the National Registry.

This past October, the Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation held an Economic Summit. The Summit provided an analysis of the primary business sectors within Ogemaw county.

Information pertaining to each sector was obtained through interviews with key stakeholders and U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

Retail

Performance over the last five years

- Sales continue to grow with more people moving to the area; however, customers are making different purchasing decisions than in the past.
- Traffic is up considerably, but sales not keeping pace with last year.
- More people are buying less.

Advantages to doing business

- Great atmosphere & aesthetics for customers and employees.
- Community support.
- Businesses work together to promote area businesses.
- Good location along Interstate.

Obstacles to doing business

- Getting too tourism oriented; relying on one group of customers.
- Businesses don't promote each other to customers as well as they could.

Ingredients businesses need to succeed

- Cooperation between businesses for promotion.
- Cooperation with local government entities for future development.
- Government and other businesses that support all business.
- Location, Location, Location.
- Visibility, Accessibility, Traffic Patterns.

2002	Number of Jobs		Ranked by Sector Size	
	County	State	County	State
Retail Trade	1,897	636,455	1	3
Government & government services	1,498	698,308	2	2
Accommodation and food services	962	354,133	3	6
Health & Social Services	840	563,924	4	4
Manufacturing	810	778,668	5	1
Arts, entertainment, & recreation	126	102,010	13	14

Industries/Businesses that compliment your business

- Niche businesses that we can all promote to set us apart from other areas - antiques, good restaurants, specialty stores, outlet stores
- Tourism related businesses

Manufacturing

Performance over the last five years

- Sales volume loss due to slow growth.
- Steady demand.
- Consolidation of distribution channels.

Advantages to doing business

- Quality of life factors.
- Good local work ethic.
- Competitive wage rates.
- Lower business operating costs.
- Lower property taxes.

Obstacles to doing business

- Distance to major airport.



- Difficult to recruit highly skilled employees.
- Transportation costs.
- Workforce training.

Ingredients businesses need to succeed

- Cooperative government.
- Capital for investment.
- Skilled workers.
- Freight equalization from the state level.

Industries/Businesses that compliment your business

- Basic metal processing.
- Fabrication shops.
- Tooling manufacturers.
- Higher tech manufacturing.
- Distribution channels.

Ogemaw County Economic Development Resources

Retention and Expansion

- *Ogemaw County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) Revolving Loan Fund:* Provides business loans to supplement or guarantee a bank loan.
- *Michigan Site Network:* A web-site in which descriptions of commercial and industrial real estate properties can be viewed.
- *Small Business Development Assistance:* Provided in partnership with the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Centers, this program provides advice and counseling to small businesses.

Attraction

- *EDC Web-site:*
<http://www.ogemawedc.com>
 This web-site provides a link to the expertise and programs offered by the EDC
- *EDC Teams:* Consisting of EDC Board members with expertise in specific market areas who are working to provide new

- businesses with specialized information
- *EDC Liaison:* Provides connections between new businesses and other entities that can help with business start up.
- *Heart of Michigan Planning Group:* A 13 county consortium engaged in developing strategies for improving and expanding telecommunications infrastructure.

Workforce Development

- *Workforce Training Advisory Board:* Provides workforce training programs for business and industry.
- *Business and Education Alliance:* A program offering advice and career advancement skills to area High School students.

Community Development

- *Ogemaw County Grant Writing Team:* A volunteer organization providing free grant writing assistance to local organizations.
- *The Growth Management Committee:*
- *Growth Assessment Planners (GAP):* Develop a growth boundary without regard to governmental jurisdictions and investigate areas of cooperation and cost savings among governmental units in relation to infrastructure.



Downtown West Branch

Economic



The I-75 Business Loop is classified as a *State Trunk Line* by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

A majority of the I-75 Business Loop has received a PASER (Pavement Surface Evaluation & Rating) of 5 - 7 calling for Capital Preventative Maintenance. A small portion of the Business loop has received a rating of 8 - 10 calling for Routine Maintenance.



Sign on I-75
Marking Exit 215 of the Business Loop

Crash Data: 2000 - 2004

The most common type of automobile crash along the Business Loop Consisted of:

- Rear-End Collisions (20.15%)
- Animal (14.5%)
- Angle Turn (9.23%)
- Side Swipe Same (9.04%)
- Angle Drive (8.66%)
- Head-On Left Turn (6.78%)

Of the 522 total crashes between 2000 and 2004 most accidents (115) occurred on Friday followed by Tuesday (89) and Wednesday (81). The month of October (61) saw the most crashes within the year followed by May (51) June (51) and July (52). Most accidents (302) occurred between 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

According to national safety guidelines,

(AASHTO), the intersections in downtown West Branch fall short of sight distance requirements, resulting in angle and sideswipe crashes on the mainline and rear end crashes on the side streets. MDOT's position would be to eliminate all on street parking which would solve almost all of the sight distance problems.

However, MDOT understands the groups concern about creating business for the West Branch Area and the store owners would not be in favor of eliminating all on street parking. What the MDOT Grayling TSC has done this past year to improve sight distance and reduce crashes (Gaylord and Pellston) is to compromise and eliminate two parking spaces on either side of the intersections.

Daily Traffic Count & Travel Mode

The average traffic count for 2004 estimates that 14,500 vehicles travel the Business Loop each day.

Most people in the county drive to work (81.8%) while .3% use public transportation and 2.1% walk. The average commute time to work is 24.8 minutes.



A view of the Business Loop
Near Exit 212