



Railroad Relocation

For the Manistee Lake Area Communities

“A comprehensive guide of supporting documentation & the benefits to industry, residents, and the communities around Manistee Lake”



October 2019

Prepared by the Manistee County Planning Department



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Cover rendering prepared by Wade Trim 2017
for the US 31 Corridor Plan (Area of Arthur St. Boat Launch)

Executive Summary

Freight transportation is a major component of the transportation activity in areas of Manistee, Michigan where both highway and rail routes converge. Traffic conflicts in urban areas are especially acute in locations surrounding urban rail facilities. Rail operations are greatly hindered in urban rail facilities, which are often surrounded by incompatible land-use activities. One approach to addressing urban vehicle-rail conflicts and urban rail operations issues, is to consider the relocation of train infrastructure to new rail corridors located to the South & East Side of Manistee Lake.

This project examines rail relocation potential in Manistee, MI including expected benefits, and recommended policies. This will be useful in assessing potential urban rail relocation in the Manistee Lake Area. The City of Manistee: Future Land Use Map dictates a Mixed-Use area highlight in red box where the rail-yard storage area is located. The following pages outline potential uses of this mixed-use area as well as benefits to railroad track abandonment for trails. Further, this document provides exciting opportunities for the surrounding jurisdictions including economic, recreation, health, and transportation.



History

The following is an excerpt from the City of Manistee’s Master Plan adopted in 2016. “The Manistee Development Plan was the planning document that has guided the City from the late 1980’s. Recognizing the challenges and development opportunism posed by the City’s numerous waterfront properties, this plan identified seven “special planning district” (SPDs) which were felt to warrant special planning treatment. All have water frontage, and most are conceived as multi-use districts consisting of public access areas, marinas, waterfront-appropriate commercial development, and housing of various densities. A major recommendation of the plan was the proposed relocations of the existing railroad right-of-way to the east side of Manistee Lake, and its replacement with a relocated US-31 business route. Also proposed to be relocated was the existing Consumer’s Energy facility along the eastern shore of Manistee Lake (SPD-2). Much of what was called for in this plan has been achieved; however, the aforementioned relocations have not occurred thus forestalling several of the recommendations for the City’s East side.”

The ongoing rail relocation project is starting to garner more steam as the vision of a healthy, vibrant community is becoming a unified vision. Discussions concerning the establishment of a loop trail around Manistee Lake need to include all municipalities which surround the lake, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, the railroad company, all industries along the lake, the DNR, MDOT as well as local residents. A trail around this lake would help link together five out of eight population centers which could eventually link to surrounding areas of the County.



Railroad Overview Map

- Railroad
- Highways
- Roads
- 10 foot Contours
- Public Lands
- Water Bodies
- Rivers

0 1,600 3,200 Feet

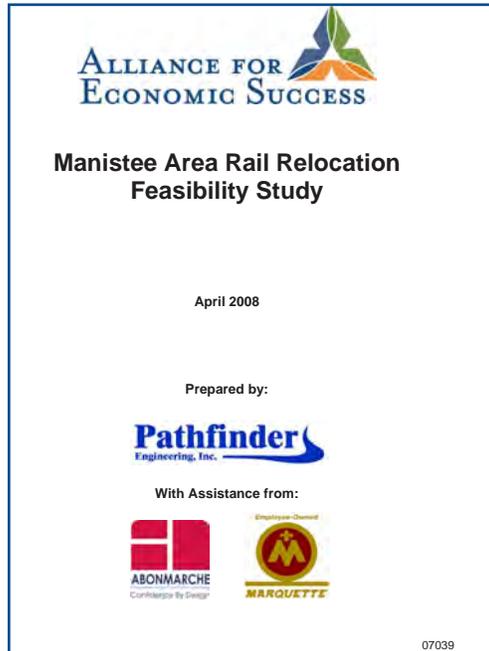
Map Created By: Manistee County Planning Department on Oct 14, 2019.



Policy and Supporting Documentation

Throughout the years, many planning processes have identified the relocation of the rail facilities from the Northern portion of Manistee Lake, through the creation of a new rail lines that would connect existing facilities along the Southern portion of Manistee Lake that serve existing industrial uses. The various planning documents are outlined here:

Rail Relocation Feasibility Study 2008:



Initial studies which explored the option of rail relocation occurred in 1989. These studies outlined the positive opportunities such as redevelopment/economic enhancement along abandoned portions of the rail corridor, should it occur. Enhanced rail service, elimination of hazardous rail highway crossings, elimination of travel over old railroad bridges including the swing bridge over the Manistee River Channel along with positive aesthetic value and recreational trails were noted enhancements.

6 options were initially considered in the 1989 study, but were whittled down to 2 options with the completion of the 2008 study. Each of these options routes the railroad south of the lake utilizing corridors on upland portions adjacent to the lake. These 2 options ranged with preliminary cost estimates listed at 10.5 and 8.7 million in 2008. A 3rd option is now being discussed in 2019, which would seek to place a bridge across a portion of the southern arm of Manistee Lake, connecting industries and existing railroad corridors. This option currently doesn't have a preliminary cost estimate.

The 2008 Study provided the following points as benefits to rail relocation around Manistee Lake:

- Continued, enhanced services to the area's rail shippers.
- Supports further rail-dependent economic development.
- Enables the use of high-capacity unit trains, should such an alternative to lake vessel transportation be desired or required.
- Elimination of five grade crossings, including two hazardous, high-traffic crossings of a primary arterial (US-31).
- Eliminates the need for a prohibitively expensive capital investment to replace low-capacity, older bridges.
- Mitigates the risk of impeding lake vessel traffic by eliminating the swing bridge.
- Opens land in the area for lucrative development, particularly in the area immediately north of the swing bridge.
- Removal of track materials while leaving the bridges in place facilitates the development of an attractive rail trail through the north shore.
- Elimination of highly visible non-aesthetically pleasing rail yards along US-31.
- Limits the possibility of a catastrophic spill into Manistee Lake.
- Re-development would likely require clean-up and/or mitigation of possible existing contaminated soils associated with the old rail yards.
- Potential expansion of industrial property which would allow for economic growth through new job creation.

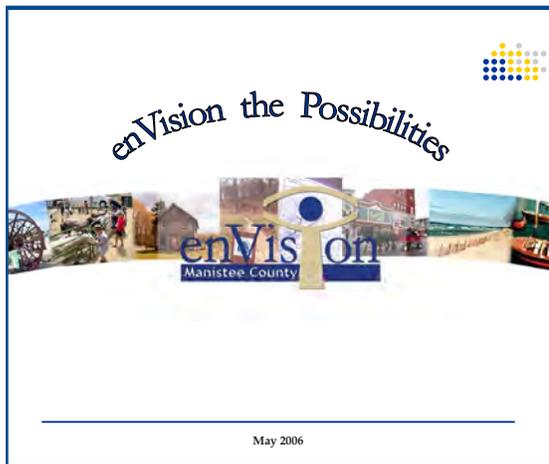
MDOT US 31 Corridor Management Plan 2004:



A Plan developed through the Michigan Department of Transportation in 2004 examined the US 31 Corridor in the City of Manistee as well as the Northern portion of Filer Township and the Southern portion of Manistee Township. The plan focused on transportation issues including the composition of US 31, access to the corridor from neighboring parcels and roadways as well as exploring issues related to congestion and confusion for motorists.

The plan identified the at grade railroad crossings, of which there are two along the US 31 corridor north of the Manistee River Channel within the City, as issues of concern that can lead to confusion for motorists. Also outlined within the plan is the “redevelopment of the rail-yard and consumers site if/when the railroad is removed, 2 accesses should be sufficient for the site.” The referenced site is immediately north of the Manistee River Channel, along the East side of US 31, and will be furthered explored later in this document.

enVision Manistee 2006:



enVision Manistee was a plan vision process which developed sound strategies and actions for moving the vision of Manistee County Forward. The vision was developed through extensive public input, that was guided by the Manistee County Community Foundation. The plan provided the following Strategies and Actions that would lead toward implementation of the vision:

Strategy: Explore opportunities to enhance the current recreation infrastructure of Manistee County

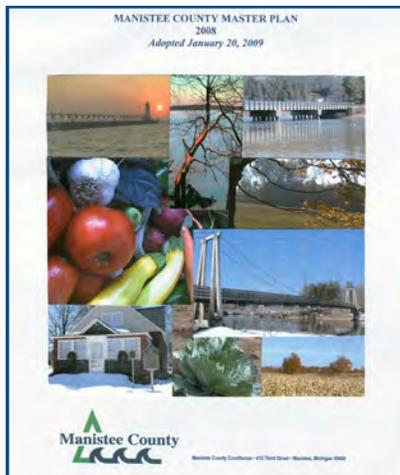
Action 3.7: Village Center Trail Connections (Explore opportunities to connect Manistee County Villages and the City via non-motorized trail-ways)

Strategy: Seek collaborative ways to better promote recreational opportunities in the County

Action 2.2: Recreational Trail Connectivity (Create and implement strategies to connect existing trails in Manistee County)

Action 2.4: County Recreation Plan (Create and implement a County Recreation Plan to address a wide range of recreational issues facing residents and visitors alike)

Manistee County Master Plan 2008:



The Manistee County Master Plan of 2008 outlined the current (as of 2008) use of the rail corridor. The County was the primary shipper of goods via rail in NW Michigan with 57% of the regions rail freight along these CSX owned rail lines. In 2005, Marquette Rail leased the CSX lines North of Grand Rapids. The plan identified the on-going relocation study mentioned in this policy section. Several Goals of the plan advocate for increased recreation opportunities and continued exploration of relocation.

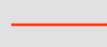
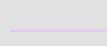
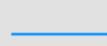
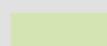
Recreation Goal: Advocate for the promotion and enhancement of the County's many recreational amenities

Objective: Link various agencies for the building and use of a County Trail system, possibly using old railroad tracks.

Transportation Goal: Advocate for the continued study of the railroad relocation project

Existing Detail Railroad Map

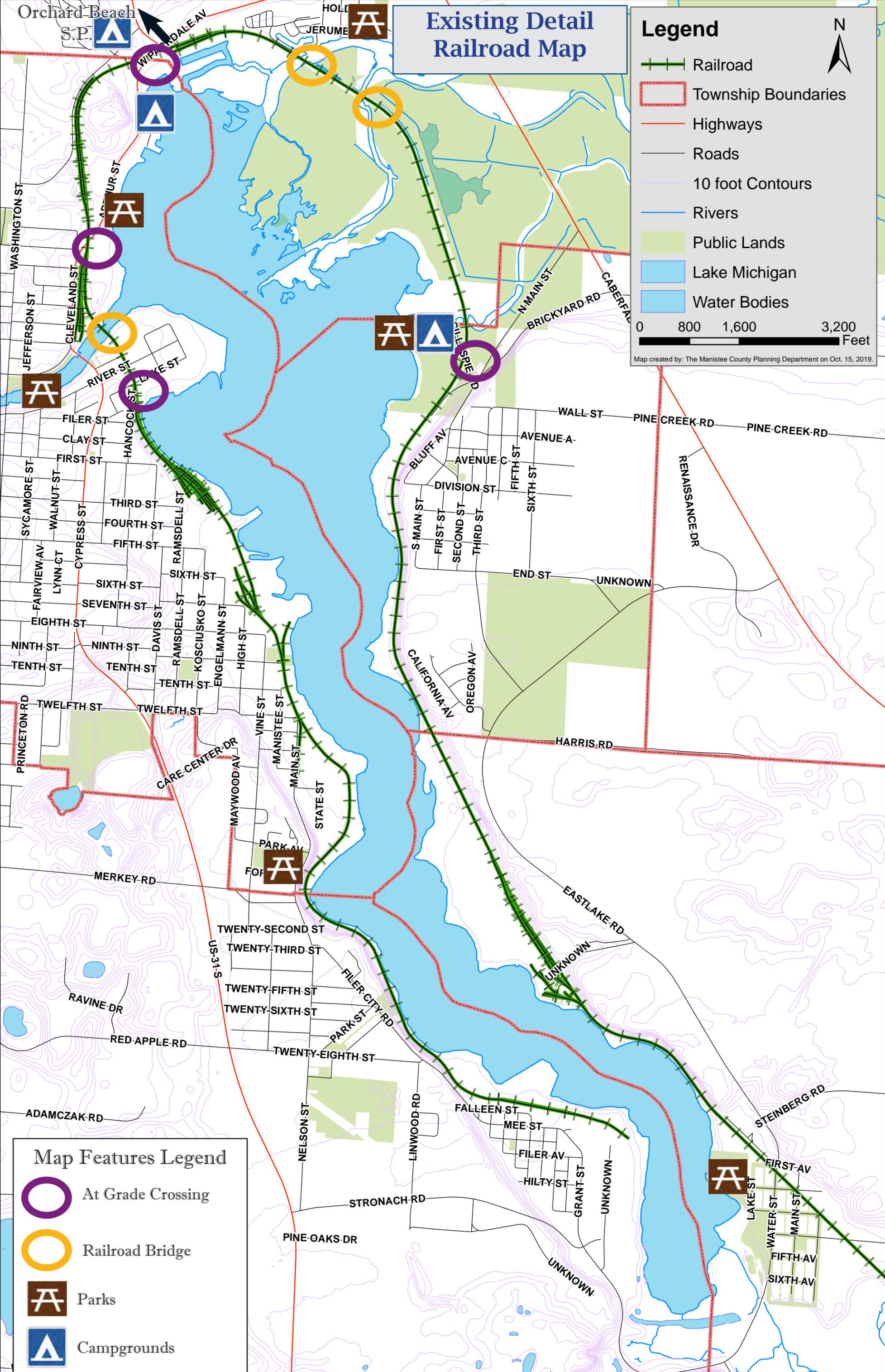
Legend

-  Railroad
-  Township Boundaries
-  Highways
-  Roads
-  10 foot Contours
-  Rivers
-  Public Lands
-  Lake Michigan
-  Water Bodies



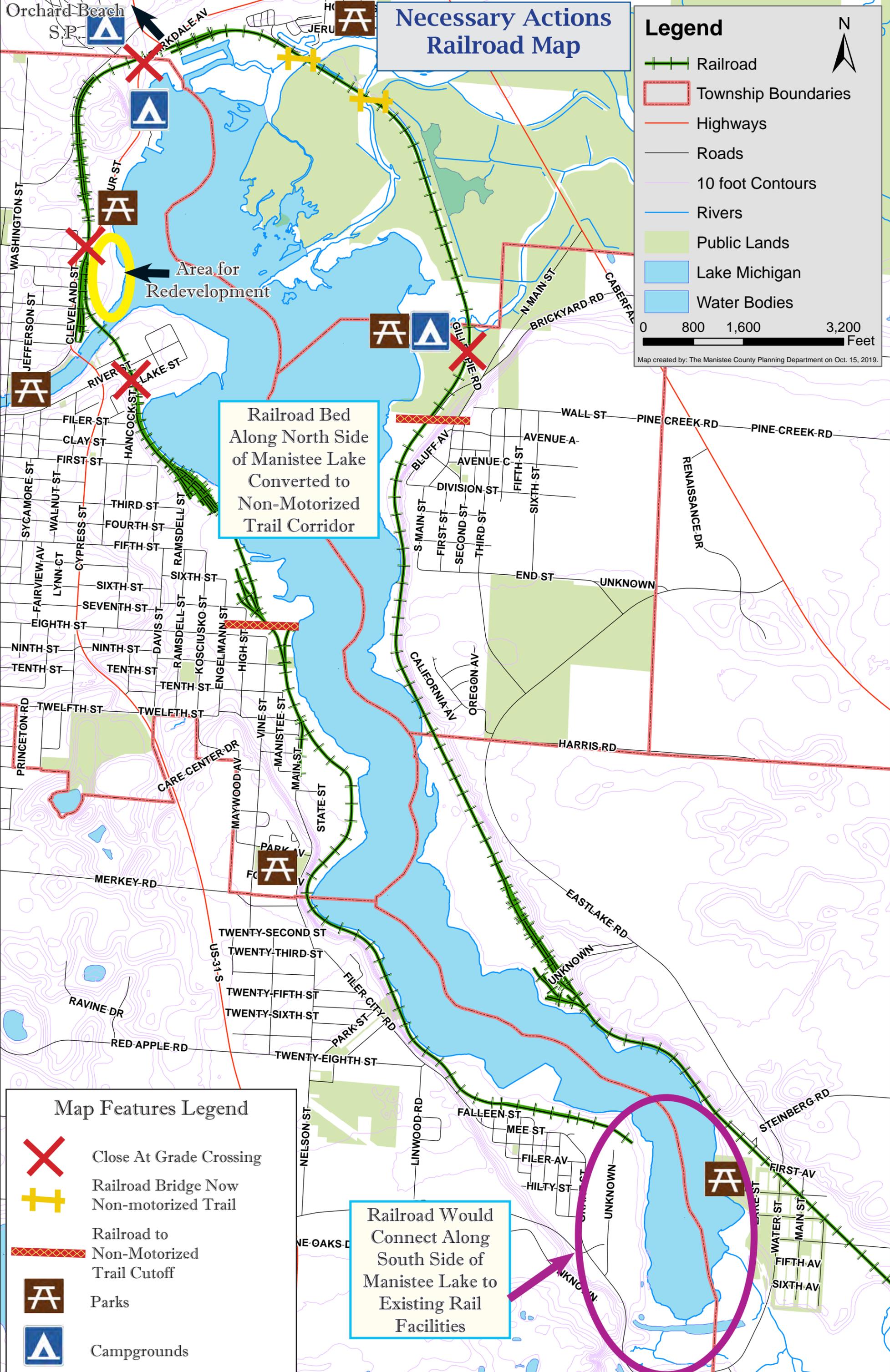
0 800 1,600 3,200 Feet

Map created by: The Manistee County Planning Department on Oct. 15, 2019.



Map Features Legend

-  At Grade Crossing
-  Railroad Bridge
-  Parks
-  Campgrounds



Necessary Actions Railroad Map

Legend

- Railroad
- Township Boundaries
- Highways
- Roads
- 10 foot Contours
- Rivers
- Public Lands
- Lake Michigan
- Water Bodies

0 800 1,600 3,200 Feet

Map created by: The Manistee County Planning Department on Oct. 15, 2019.

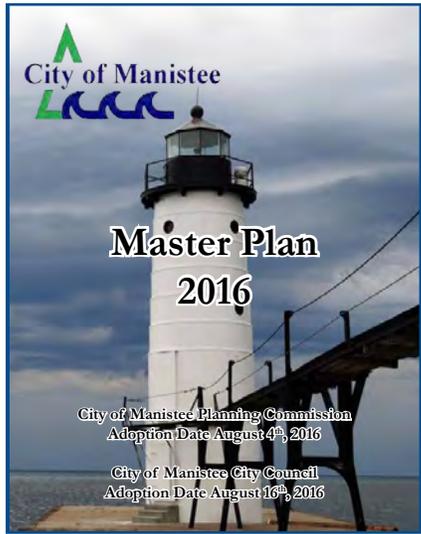
Railroad Bed
Along North Side
of Manistee Lake
Converted to
Non-Motorized
Trail Corridor

Railroad Would
Connect Along
South Side of
Manistee Lake to
Existing Rail
Facilities

Map Features Legend

- Close At Grade Crossing
- Railroad Bridge Now Non-motorized Trail
- Railroad to Non-Motorized Trail Cutoff
- Parks
- Campgrounds

City of Manistee Master Plan 2016:



The City of Manistee Master Plan, which was revised in 2016, outlines the discussion for rail relocation dating back to 1989. It identifies important aspects of rail relocation as elimination of the swing bridge over the channel and the two at grade crossings along US 31, along with opportunities for expanded recreation. The following Goals and Tasks associated with the relocation are shown below:

Goal 1: Continued support of non-motorized transportation and the non-motorized transportation committee.

Task: Continue to support work towards non-motorized connections to destinations and amenities both within and outside the City.

Goal 3: Continue to provide deep water port and rail access.

Task: Identify current need of established rail system, rail-yards and options.

Manistee County-Wide Recreation Plan 2016:



The Manistee County-Wide Recreation Plan of 2016 completed State DNR approved 5-year recreation plans for all communities within Manistee County. The planning process, which sought expansive public input, found that trail development was a top priority coming from residents within each of the communities in the County. The Plan outlines a Manistee Lake Trail Loop “The Manistee Lake Trail is suggested as a non-motorized trail route which would encompass the entirety of Manistee Lake, linking all communities which surround the lake. Discussions concerning the establishment of a loop trail around Manistee Lake need to include all municipalities which surround the lake, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, the railroad companies, all industries along the lake, the DNR as well as local residents.” Each local unit of government around the lake has a goal oriented toward trail development connecting all communities around the lake.

Manistee County US 31 Corridor Enhancement Plan 2017:



The US 31 Corridor Enhancement Plan completed in 2017 through the Manistee County Planning Department & AES developed a vision for the entirety of the US 31 Corridor. The vision identified character for the corridor, of which the image placed on the front cover of this document, displays the desired vision for the area of US 31 immediately North of the Manistee River Channel.

The corridor plan provides vision for a walkable, aesthetically pleasing corridor which links areas of the community with sidewalks and trails that seek to garner economic development as a ripple effect of beautification, form and preservation. The plan outlines support for a trail corridor around Manistee, the redevelopment of the rail-yard and

Consumers Energy site immediately North of the river channel, as well as other trail connections and beautification efforts that span into each of the communities outside of the City but within the confines of the County.

Opportunities

Relocation of the existing railroad will serve as a catalyst for change along Manistee Lake. This section will detail many of the benefits that will be experienced if the plan to relocate the railroad were to move forward.

Economic:

The economic development and land use benefits are an extremely important consideration that extend to both the public and private sectors. Relocating the railroad from the North side of Manistee Lake will lead to many beneficial elements to the City of Manistee and other communities around the lake.

The amount of linear feet abandoned would total over 18,000 feet, or about 3.5 miles of track. This is a significant amount of space that traverses through some sensitive landscapes including the Manistee River Channel and Peter's Bayou. Land use benefits primarily focus on the redevelopment of the urban rail yard North of the channel along the East side of US-31 that could be transformed into a mixed-use development with residential and commercial uses, increasing tax base and land values. The amount of water frontage on this parcel is nearly 2,500 ft while the US-31 frontage is around 2,100 ft. City of Manistee Assessment values for Riverfront, assess each foot at \$650/ft. and US-31 frontage at \$685/ft., therefore the potential taxable value of the vacated parcels could equate upwards of over \$3 million dollars per year.

Trails and greenways provide countless opportunities for economic renewal and growth. Increased values, along with tourism and recreation-related spending on items such as bicycles, in-line skates, food, entertainment and lodging are just a few of the ways trails and greenways positively impact community economies. Similar communities to Manistee have developed Community Economic Impact statements which quantifies recreation activities including: hiking/walking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, trail running, cross-country skiing, birding, roller-blading, etc. The overall takeaway from this is for every \$0.05 the community puts in to the recreation facilities; they receive \$1.40 in daily user spending impact.

Recreation:

Existing Regional Trails and Large Trail Parks in Manistee County were outlined in the 2016 Manistee County-Wide Recreation Plan. There is a large missing segment of trail around Manistee Lake, the largest population center in the County. There are many public recreation sites as well as public land which can be incorporated with the rail relocation to provide a more comprehensive linear park system.

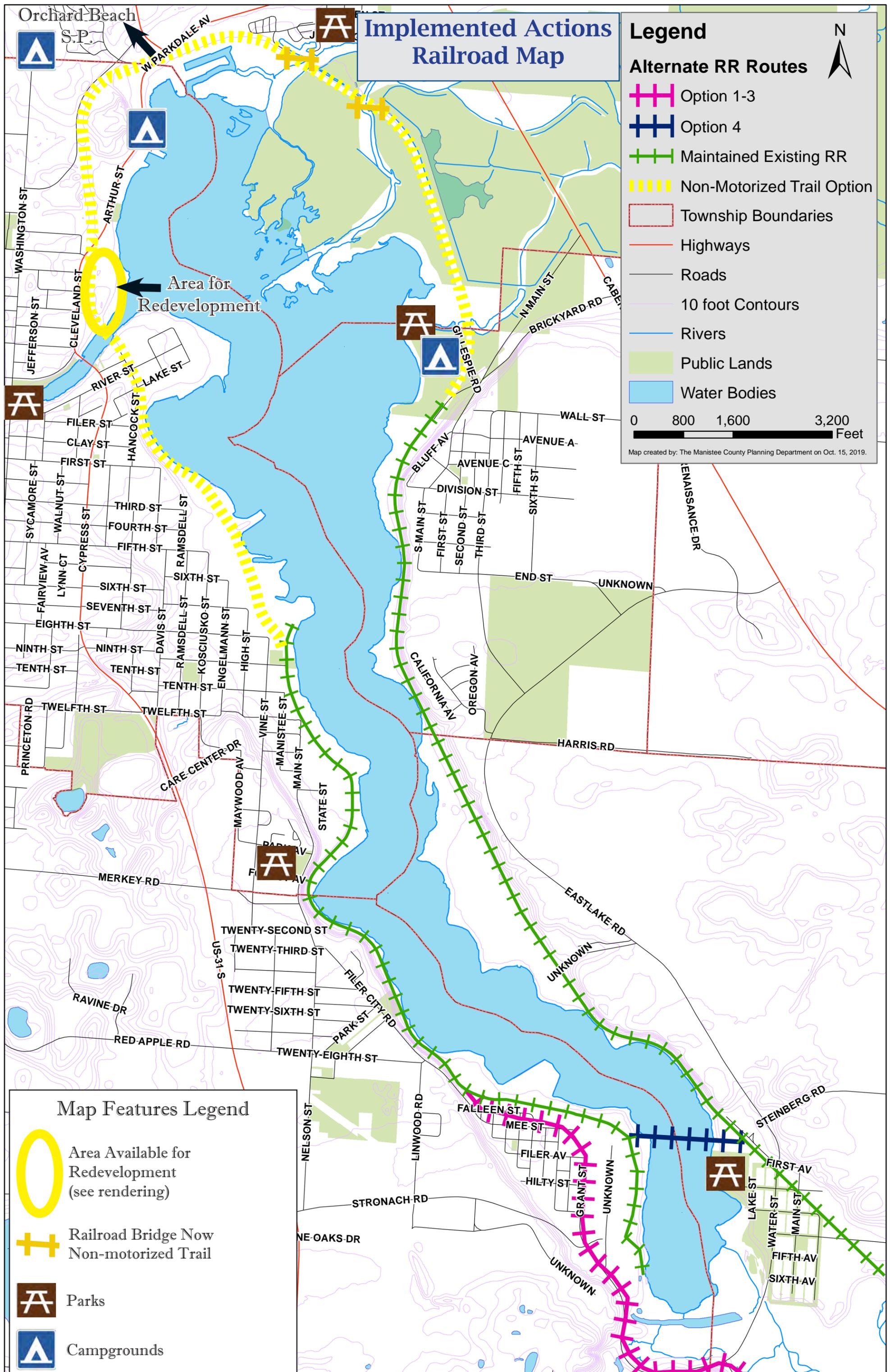
Recreation open space such as trail systems can assist in protecting important habitats while providing corridors for people to safely and inexpensively get regular exercise while living in an urban environment. Trails have the power to connect residents and visitors to the Manistee Lake area with local business and historical sites that define the character of the area.

Health:

A region's trail network will contribute to the overall health of residents by offering people attractive, safe, accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog, skate, and places to enjoy water-based trails. In short, trail networks create better opportunity for active lifestyles. The design of trails and other public recreations facilities affects people's ability to reach the recommended 30 minutes each day of moderately intense physical activity (60 minutes for youth). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Physical inactivity causes numerous physical and mental health problems, is responsible for an estimated 200,000 deaths per year, and contributes to the obesity epidemic."

Transportation:

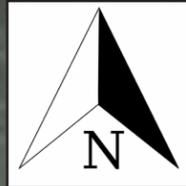
The transportation benefit category analyzes different sectors including railroad efficiencies, highway-rail grade separations, vehicular delays, emergency vehicle delays, and trucking operations. The



Vision for Redevelopment of the former Rail-yard and Consumers Site

Rendering Overview

This rendered site plan vision portrays a once industrial site transitioned into a mixed use development, with housing options for varied income levels, retail space for both large and small scale businesses, park and open space which accommodates the public; and includes a River-walk extension, sidewalks, fountains, green space, fishing piers and additional boat trailer capacity for the Arthur St. Boat Launch.



Former Rail Corridor

Additional Boat Trailer Parking for Arthur St. Boat Launch

Extended "River Walk" & Fishing Piers

Sidewalks Extended Along US 31

Ample Open Space for Recreation & Green Stormwater Infrastructure

Connection to Downtown

Legend

-  Small Retail Space
-  Large Retail Space
-  Condo Residential Space
-  Multi-Family Condo & Apartment Residential Space



Rail Relocation infrastructure and operations improvements are expected to provide increased railroad efficiencies in Manistee. Eliminating the swing bridge will help save time and capital regarding maintenance projects that occur due to the old age of the bridge and difficulties in obtaining correct parts to repair the structure. The amount of road crossings a relocated railroad will eliminate equates to 4 crossings (2 on US-31) that will help ease congestion that occurs around the City of Manistee. The proposed bypass routes reduce the miles traveled by train cars to local industries which equates into a savings of hours and monetary expenses.

Railroad Relocation Synopsis of Findings

- Initial discussions within plans concerning relocation date back to 1989.
- Support for relocation contained within 7 planning documents.
- Recently obtained public input maintains support for relocation among residents and visitors.
- Opportunities if relocation occurs include Economic, Recreation, Health and Transportation.
- If relocation occurs, abandoned track would total 18,000 linear feet or 3.5 miles of railroad bed. This could then be converted to a linear non-motorized trail.
- A trail would connect 4 local units of government and the population (approximately 15,000 residents, equating to about half of the populous in the County) around Manistee Lake.
- Four at grade road crossings would be eliminated.
- Three bridges over water courses would be eliminated from the rail route, including the swing bridge over the Manistee River Channel.
- Rail-yard North of the Manistee River Channel and East of US 31 would likely be available for redevelopment. This would provide the following benefits:
 - 2,500 feet of water frontage on Manistee Lake & River Channel, with assessed values equaling \$650.00 a linear foot.
 - 2,100 feet of US 31 frontage, with assessed values equaling \$685.00 a linear foot.
 - This would equate to upwards of over \$3 million dollars per year in taxable value, and likely more considering the area available for redevelopment activities.
- Recent studies in Northwest Michigan have shown that for every investment of \$0.05 from a community in recreation facilities (trails), they receive \$1.40 in daily user impact.
- Health impacts of daily recreation activity reduce obesity epidemic and can provide significant health care savings.
- Relocation of the railroad corridor provides shorter connections to industries, saving time and money.
- Commuter delays due to rail crossings would be eliminated, providing safer passage on US 31 and adjacent roadways.
- Rail relocation cost estimates from the 2008 study were around \$10 million, these estimates should be updated.