

Asset Management Facts (A.M. Facts)

Understanding the Adjusted Census Urban Boundaries

Urban and rural designations are used for national statistics and dividing up the various "sources" of money for road projects in Michigan. Some sources of money are for urban road projects, others are for rural road projects. Michigan Transportation Fund and federal legislation use these urban and rural designations to determine what source of road funding can be used on a road project.

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census releases information on urban areas. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requires states to use U.S. Census urban areas with populations of more than 5,000 for urban designations, with the option of adjusting boundaries outward for transportation purposes. Michigan has traditionally chosen to adjust them with help from local road agencies because the U.S. Census urban areas are typically odd shaped and do not always include areas with "urban" characteristics, such as shopping malls, industrial complexes, airports, etc.

Another issue that transportation agencies encounter when using U.S. Census urban areas is that a road designation may change from urban to rural and back to urban within a short distance. An urban or rural road project should involve repairing a continuous stretch of road. The adjustment process allows adding the short rural areas to the urban boundary to create a continuous urban designation. One additional process, called "smoothing," allows the boundary to be adjusted within reason to be a more pleasing or sensible shape. The resulting urban areas are not synonymous with urban land use; these urban areas are for transportation purposes.

Federal guidance encourages all road agencies, sovereign tribal governments, and public transit agencies to be invited in a cooperative process to adjust U.S. Census urban areas. The cooperative process is coordinated by the state, which serves as a fair broker. The adjusted U.S. Census urban areas are submitted to FHWA for approval. Once the U.S. Census urban area adjustments are approved by FHWA, they become the state's official Adjusted Census Urban Boundaries (ACUB). The ACUB's can be viewed on the Web mapping application located at: <http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/acub/>.

A.M. Facts was developed by the Asset Management Division, within the Michigan Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Planning, to provide an overview of the many processes and projects the Asset Management Division is responsible for and oversees.