



REGIONAL BUS AUTHORITY

# connections

MAY  
2009

## **NIRPC Comprehensive Plan Decisions Critical for Transit**

*NIRPC is holding public input workshops for their transportation plan in June in Hammond, Westville, Merrillville Gary and Portage, where you as a citizen, will influence decisions about how Northwest Indiana will look and function from now for us to 2040 for our children and grandchildren.*

*The creation of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan will build consensus about how the region thrive economically, with equitable treatment of all persons, while protecting the environment, creating jobs and improving the quality of life. For public transportation users, the process must address in the short term the need to preserve and improve local services and address the immediate collapse of existing service. In the long term, the plan must support the creation of land-use that reinforces transit markets for a substantial portion of population and jobs in the region.*

*For meeting times and locations call NIRPC at (219) 763-6060 or visit [www.nirpc.org](http://www.nirpc.org). Your active participation in one of these meetings is critical.*

*From Ken Dallmeyer,  
Planning & Transit Director,  
Regional Bus Authority*

## **Keep 'Little Buses' Rolling in Lake County!**

*By Margot Ann Sabato, Executive Director, South Lake County Community Services*

Let me be clear: demand response service provided by Southlake County Community Services is ongoing and even expanding.

In fact, our limited growth is a result of efforts to offer a "skeletal service" to people who once relied upon transit services supplied by the Northwest Indiana Community Action (NWICA) Agency.



It will help a few people, but not nearly enough to meet overwhelming demand. Our three additional buses to serve Hobart and Ross Townships simply cannot make up for the service once provided by 24 buses from NWICA.

When NWICA service stopped, our phones rang off the hook for weeks from often desperate people. But that's just the tip of the iceberg when service ends. The other problem is when a transit service is shut down, funds are dispersed elsewhere to other agencies. Some funds came here to help with expanded service, but most went outside of Lake County. So it is remarkably difficult to re-establish service once funding is lost.

So let me say this about our small but important contribution: When bus service is adversely affected at one agency, it affects all of us. While some may not view demand response as "public trans," it is. In fact, we operate under the same state and federal guidelines as the Chicago Transit Authority or PACE. Also, we are part of the Regional Bus Authority

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# Keep 'Little Buses' Rolling in Lake County! *continued*

(RBA), and have benefited from their work, including a grant initiative to replace buses. Otherwise, the \$60,000 received from the RBA would have been paid by our communities.

Still, it is not easy because we are a small agency. On the other hand, our challenges are far different from the larger agencies that provide fixed route services. Fortunately, our funding is secure for now. But who knows what will happen in the next 18 months. If our local communities are impacted by the changing property tax situation, it could be a new ballgame. Here's the point: public transportation – whether fixed route or demand response - needs a dedicated funding source.

Again, let me be clear. We regard our service as a vital lifeline for our communities. For many of our passengers, our buses are the only way they can go to the doctor, the grocery store, the pharmacy, or therapies. Without these buses, they would be dependent on family or friends for rides, or just literally trapped within their homes.

So we are proud of the quality service our small agency provides. Last year, our four buses provided over 13,000 one-way trips to seven townships. In the coming weeks, we expect seven buses to provide over 23,000 one-way trips to a total of nine townships. It's still not enough, but it's the best we can do.

Of course, we could use more buses! It is heartbreaking to tell someone with a medical condition that our buses are fully booked. Now let me tell you about a success story that exemplifies our service. One of our retired drivers, now in his 80's, often reminds me he wants to drive our buses again. He is visually impaired and has a deteriorating medical condition. But he is able to live in his own home, due in part to our transportation services.

His story multiplied many times over is what keeps our little buses rolling!



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