



CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION



PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF PLAN

Northwest Indiana is in the midst of becoming a premiere location in the development of routes that accommodate bicycle and pedestrian traffic. In the form of off- and on-road facilities, the region continues to work to connect communities within its borders. We are on the cusp of linking to several adjacent locations, especially in Illinois and Michigan. This, along with the passage of Complete Streets Guidelines by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), amply demonstrates that the region thoroughly recognizes the value of creating opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian transportation.



As part of these efforts to promote and expand the opportunities available to bicyclists and pedestrians, NIRPC is proud to publish the **2010 Ped & Pedal Plan**. This plan update builds upon the work that was previously done in the *2005 Ped & Pedal Plan* and the *1994 Regional Bikeways Plan*. The 1994 plan was significant because it represented the first in-depth analysis on developing a vast network of bicycle-friendly trails and roadways in Northwest Indiana. The 2005 plan carried the work done in that plan even further and expanded upon it by adding a pedestrian element.

Ped & Pedal also seeks to educate on the many benefits of non-motorized facility development in a community, which include the following:

- a) *Traffic Reduction*: With more travelers opting to use trails, this directly leads to fewer automobiles on the road, aiding the flow of traffic.
- b) *Air Quality*: Fewer cars equate to less pollution from auto exhausts and less idling at traffic signals or avoiding traffic jams.
- c) *Health*: Where more people opt to travel by bike or foot, this lends significantly to better health, helping to stem the current obesity epidemic that our country faces.
- d) *Economic Development*: Trails have proven to be a highly desirable amenity to any community, usually spearheading new business of all varieties along their route. Proximity to trails also been shown to increase property value.
- e) *Quality of Life*: With all the above mentioned, a greater quality of life is the end result, making a community more livable, and thus able to retain residents and businesses – and attract new ones.



1. Transportation Enhancement Committee

In response to the growing number of applications for new trail starts, NIRPC brought together a committee whose mandate was to review all applications submitted to INDOT, and develop a ranking methodology to aid in the state's final selection for projects in the NIRPC region. This group, which came to be called the Transportation Enhancement (TE) Committee, was formed in 1999, and created the first NIRPC application package for projects submitted for TE funding in FY 2001 (more on the federal TE program in Chapter 3). The package included detailed ranking criteria for all new applications, with separate forms being created for all eligible projects for TE funding including pedestrian and bicycle activities, historic sites/activities, and scenic/commerce/other activities.



Apart from their charge to rank new projects, another major activity by the committee regarded the establishment of regional priority trails and study corridors in the NIRPC region. From their discussions, five major corridors emerged which included:

- 1) The Erie Lackawanna/Conrail Trail Corridor from Hammond to Hebron.
- 2) The Oak Savannah/Prairie Duneland Trail Corridor from Griffith to Chesterton.
- 3) The Grand Calumet River/Marquette Trail Corridor from Hammond to Porter.
- 4) The Little Calumet River Trail Corridor from Hammond/Highland to Porter.
- 5) The Calumet Trail Corridor from Porter to Michigan City.



2. New Plan Development

In 2010 it was decided that the time had come to update the *2005 Ped & Pedal Plan* in accordance with its first plan implementation policy. The policy reads: "Updating the *Ped & Pedal Plan* to reflect past successes in trail development, plan for future facilities, and provide added focus on pedestrian-related travel, broadening the spectrum of non-motorized travel options."

To help aid in the updating process, five subcommittees were formed in order to discuss different subject areas relevant to the plan update. These committees covered the topic



areas of Goals, Objectives, and Policies; Priority Corridor Routes; Best Practices/Issues; Financial Strategies; and Implementation. Each of these subcommittees addressed certain issues and concerns encountered either with previous or current bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts. The 2010 plan, which is the final product of these subcommittee meetings, not only updates the 2005 plan, but also seeks to further refine what NIRPC hopes to accomplish in continuing to build Northwest Indiana's non-motorized infrastructure.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Over the years, several efforts have been made at increasing the amount of non-motorized facilities in Northwest Indiana, as well as highlighting their positive impacts on communities around the state. The following section outlines the most significant initiatives.

1. NIRPC Efforts



The last major planning effort focusing on bicycle and pedestrian issues in this region was the *Northwest Indiana Regional Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan of 2005*. Not only did this plan expand upon the bicycle elements first called for in 1994, but it added a pedestrian element as well. This gave Northwest Indiana a more comprehensive plan focused solely on multiple forms of non-motorized transportation.



The 2005 plan brought some focus to the *benefits* of non-motorized transportation infrastructure. Instead of just focusing on connectivity, the plan also provided information on the health and environmental benefits of walking and biking. This provided a more well-rounded background for what Northwest Indiana stands to gain from a regional focus on non-motorized transportation infrastructure.

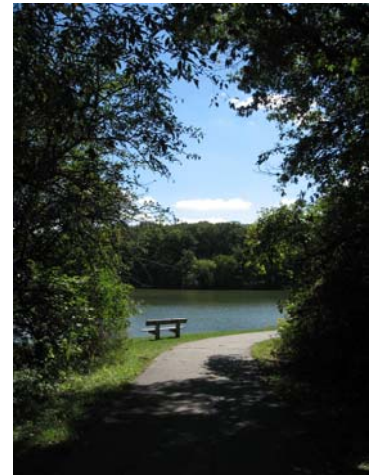
The predecessor to both the 2005 and 2010 plans, however, was the *1994 Regional Bikeways Plan for Northwest Indiana*. Before 1994, any efforts at trails planning had been less comprehensive in nature. The 1974 *NIRPC Bikeways Map* was just a concept of where bike routes could and should have been developed. Intermodalism was not a consideration at the time, and it remained largely unimplemented. The 1990 *Trail Opportunities Plan* was a joint venture between

NIRPC, IDNR, and the National Parks Service. Its goal was to produce a comprehensive, multi-faceted regional trail plan for Northwestern Indiana that went beyond just bicycling facilities. The 1994 plan, however, represented the most comprehensive review to date on potential routes in Northwest Indiana.

The connectivity between points of interest was the primary consideration during the development of the *Regional Bikeways Plan*. Destinations within the region that could potentially be accessed by bicycle or foot instead of by automobile were catalogued. These destinations included major employment centers, educational facilities, recreational areas, transit services, and municipal or institutional buildings. Utilizing a consultative process, a network of proposed bicycle routes was defined to interconnect the points of interest.

The determination of proposed bicycle routes reflected consideration of property potentially available for route development. Abandoned railroad corridors, highway rights-of-way, river levees, waterways and utility easements each provided opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian facility development. The *Regional Bikeways Plan* defined a network of bicycle facilities extending over 1,200 miles throughout the region and utilizing all forms of available property. In the end, 27 routes were identified and ranked as priority routes in the NIRPC region.

In 1995, the *NIRPC Origin Destination Study* attempted to examine the mode choice for all trips by Northwest Indiana residents aged 14 years or older. The survey determined that 13,143 bicycle trips and 11,836 pedestrian trips occurred daily in the region representing 5.2% of all trips. The majority of these non-motorized trips (over 63%) were “home based other” trips, including school, personal business, and recreational trips to or from home. Approximately 18% of non-motorized trips were “non home based” involving travel between work, school, shopping, and recreational activities. Almost 10% of all non-motorized trips constituted travel between home and retail facilities (“home based shopping” trips) while less than 9% of all non-motorized trips were between home and a place of employment (“home based work” trips).





2. State & Local Planning

In 2006, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) released their *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. This 5 year plan is aimed at improving recreation opportunities while protecting natural resources in Indiana by establishing priorities and recommendations for decision-makers. The SCORP showed that between 1979 and 2005 hiking/walking/jogging and bicycling have consistently ranked within the top ten recreational activities in Indiana each of the five times the survey has been done. In the most recent survey, hiking/walking/jogging ranked number one with 84.9% of respondent participating. Bicycling was done by 43.7% of respondents.



SCORP took an in-depth look at trail development and user preferences throughout the state. Through its analysis, walking/running were identified as the number one activity on trails at 72.7%. Hiking/backpacking followed at 33.3%, with touring bicycling ranking third with 19.8%. In terms of water trail recreation, canoeing/kayaking was done by 14.1% of trail users. The plan also made various recommendations, including providing trails that “accommodate people of various abilities,” by bringing trails closer to communities, linking existing trails, and connecting communities to destinations.



The Indiana Trails, Greenways, and Bikeways Plan was produced in July, 2006 by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources in cooperation with the Indiana Department of Transportation, the Governor’s Council for Physical Fitness & Sports, the Indiana Department of Tourism, and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation. The goal of the plan is to develop a statewide system of trails for both recreation and transportation that puts every Hoosier within 15 minutes, or 7.5 miles, of a trail. A map within the plan shows the bulk of the region’s population is already within this goal distance. The plan is meant to be a tool for the improvement of existing trails as well as development of new ones. It focuses not only on trails for bicycle and pedestrian use, but for many other types of uses such as equestrian trails and areas for off-road driving.

DEMOGRAPHICS

As with any major planning effort, a snapshot of the existing demographics needs to be outlined. In this section, there will be a discussion on those existing land use features that may be able to facilitate future trail development.

1. Regional Population

Population trends for the three county NIRPC region provided the control data for the *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*. The same population forecasts will be used for the *2010 Ped & Pedal Plan*.

From 1990 to 2000, Northwest Indiana experienced positive demographic and economic changes. Growth in the region during this decade reversed the overall population declines which began after 1970 and were accelerated by the negative trends from 1980 to 1990 due primarily to the rapid restructuring of the region's steel industry. Population in the Lake, Porter, and LaPorte County region increased from 711,592 in 1990 to 741,468 in 2000, reflecting a growth of 29,876 persons or 4.2%.

Between 2000 and 2008 this trend of an increasing population continued, with the population of the three-county area rising to 766,869 by 2008. This reflects a growth of 25,401 persons or 3.4%. By county from 2000 to 2008, Lake increased 1.9% to 493,800, Porter increased 10.5% to 161,181, and LaPorte increased .7% to 110,888. Of the 25,401 person increase, 36% was in Lake, 61% was in Porter, and 3% was in LaPorte.

During the same period of time between 2000 and 2008, the region experienced the continued aging of the population. The median age of the population increased from 35.9 in 2000 to 37.5 in 2008 in Lake, from 36.3 to 37.9 in Porter, and from 37.1 to 38.6 in LaPorte. This poses a serious problem when issues of elderly and disabled mobility are addressed. This would include the development of proper facilities for safe, non-motorized movements of these highly dependent populations.





2. Pedestrian & Bicycle Travel in the Region

A. Bicycle Usage

Bicycle usage in Northwest Indiana is currently not monitored by local public agencies, park departments, or planning departments. The only available bicycle usage data for the three county region is taken from the decennial Census (2000 and earlier), and now the American Community Survey, question on journey to work daily travel asked of workers 16 years of age and older who worked during a reference week prior to the completion of the questionnaire. The data specific to bicycles is derived from the means of transportation to work, which asked the mode of travel to work during the reference week. Modes of travel to the worksite include drive alone, carpool, bus, trolley, subway, railroad, ferry, taxi, motorcycle, bicycle, walk, other and work at home. In 2000, 331,519 workers from the three county region made a work trip. By 2008, work trips by workers in the region totaled 342,801, an increase of 11,282 trips or 3.4%. Bicycle trips to work increased from 607 in 2000 to 672 in 2008, or 10.7%. In 2008, just 0.2% of all work trips by workers in the three-county region were by bicycle. **Chapter 2** explains in detail many factors behind such low mode usage.



In Lake County in 2000, there were 208,957 persons making a trip to work. By 2008, 215,162 were making a work trip from Lake County, an increase of 3% or 6,205 workers. Of the work trips made by Lake County workers in 2008, 292 people chose a bicycle as their travel mode, representing 0.1% of all the work trips made from Lake County. From 2000 to 2008 the number of workers from Lake County using a bicycle as the primary mode of travel to the work site increased by 5% or 14 workers.



The number of bicycle work trips increased in LaPorte and Porter counties from 2000 to 2008, furthering the rise in bicycle work trips experienced from 1990 to 2000. From 2000 to 2008 the number of persons from LaPorte County making a work trip decreased from 50,121 to 49,506, a decrease of 615 or 1.2%. Persons using a bicycle as their means of travel to work increased from 177 in 2000 to 245 in 2008. The number of work trips from Porter County rose from 72,441 in 2000 to 78,133 in 2008, or 7.9%. In 2000, workers us-

ing a bicycle for work trips totaled 152. By 2008, 135 people identified the bicycle as their means of traveling to work, or 0.2% of all modes. From 2000 to 2008, the number of people from Porter County using a bicycle to arrive at work decreased by 11.2%, reversing the increase of 1.5% experienced from 1990 to 2000.

B. Walking Trips to Work

As with bicycle usage, an available source of data in Northwest Indiana on walking trips is the Census and/or American Community Survey journey to work question on daily travel by mode. In 2000, of the 331,519 workers traveling from the three county region, 6,695 or 2% walked to work. By 2008, walking trips to work had decreased to 6,142 and accounted for 1.8% of the 342,801 work trips made. In the preceding decade of 1990 to 2000, workers walking to work decreased by 20% while the total number of work trips actually increased 7.8%.

In 2000, 2%, or 4,136 workers from Lake County making a work trip walked to work. By 2008, 1.2%, or 4,085 walked to work. From 2000 to 2008 the number of workers from Lake County using the walking to work mode decreased by 1.2% as total work trips from Lake County increased 3%. From 2000 to 2008 the number of workers walking to work from LaPorte County decreased from 1,006 to 981, or 2.5%. Persons walking to work in 2000 accounted for 2% of work trips. This percentage held steady for 2008. Work trips from Porter County, which rose 7.9% from 72,441 to 78,133 between 2000 and 2008, included a decrease of 30.7% in the number of people walking to work. In 2000, 1,553 workers from Porter County chose walking to work as their mode of travel. Walking to work accounted for 2.1% of total work trips from Porter County in 2000. By 2008, 1,076, or 1.4%, of work trips were workers walking to work.





3. Existing Physical Inventory

A. Abandoned Rail Corridors

There are several advantages of using railroad rights-of-way for bikeway development. Since railroads are interregional, abandoned railroad rights-of-way stretch through an entire region, connecting several municipalities, the bikeway networks in those municipalities, other regional bikeways, and bikeways from outside the region. For this reason, abandoned railroad rights-of-way should be used to form the backbone of a regional trail network.



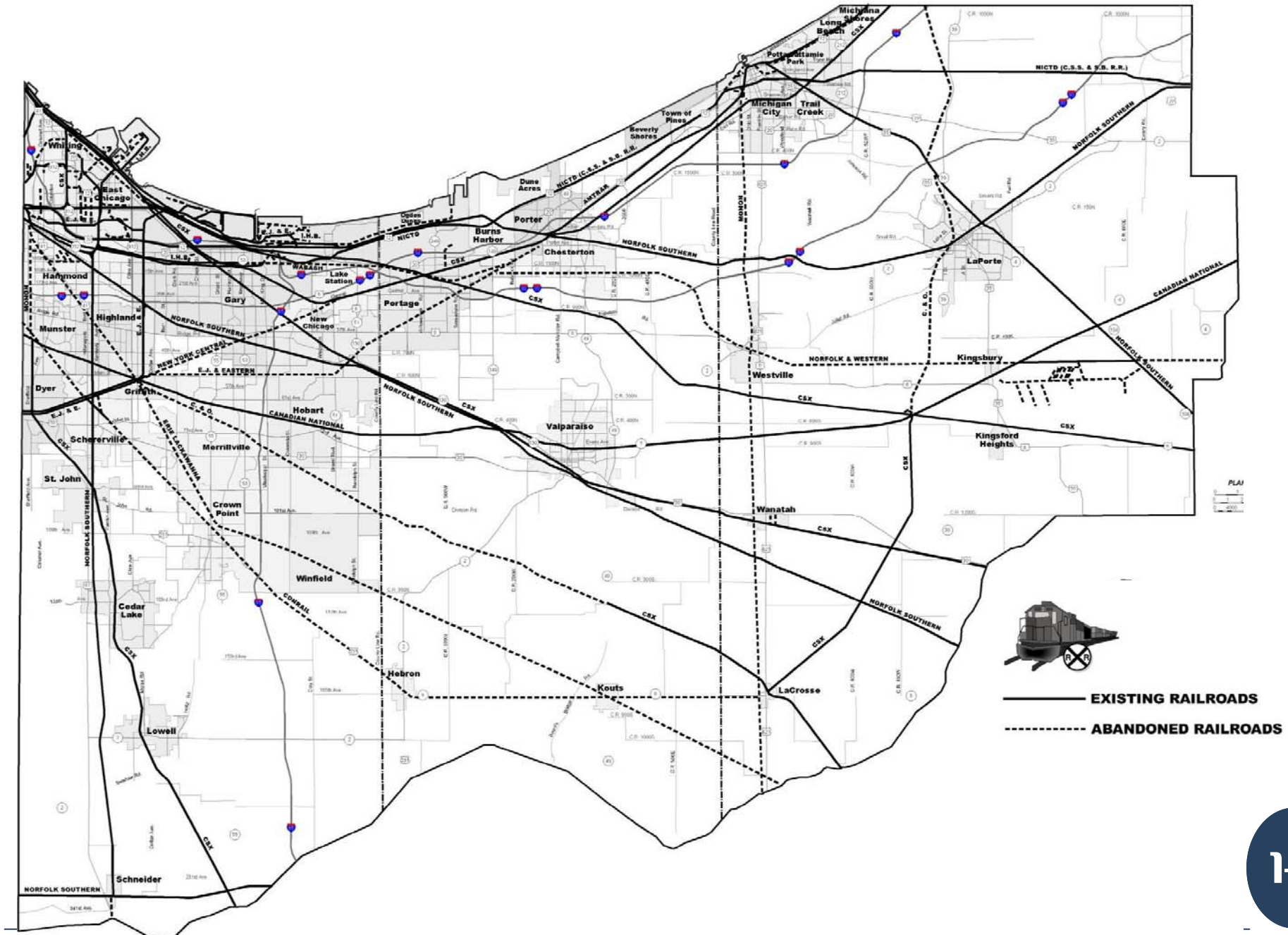
In Northwest Indiana, the massive abandonment of secondary railroad lines in the early 1980s has provided the area with an opportunity to develop a large backbone of regional routes. Altogether, six main lines and all or parts of three branch lines were abandoned in the region between 1980 and 1986; virtually all of these rights-of-way are still intact. A map of existing and abandoned rail lines is shown in *Figure 1-1*.



There are, however, a number of problems associated with the development of these abandoned rights-of-way as trails. The first has to do with who actually owns the rights-of-way. Most railroads, at the time they were built in the mid to late 1800s, attempted to purchase as much of the property needed for their rights-of-way as they could. However, a railroad could not acquire all the property they needed. In these cases, the railroad would arrange with a property owner to grant the railroad an easement wide enough to run a railroad on, under the condition that the property would revert back to the control of the original property (or his heirs) should the rail line be abandoned and the tracks be pulled up.

This situation has caused the development of a controversy now that many of these lines have been abandoned. Many landowners whose properties adjoin abandoned railroad rights-of-way have claimed "reversionary property rights," claiming that the rights-of-way should revert to them now that it is no longer used as a railroad. Some of these adjoining property owners have shown that they are rightful heirs to easement rights granted a cen-

Figure 1-1: Existing & Abandoned Railroads





ture ago, but many others have no such proof. On several occasions, groups of reversionary landowners and claimants have sought to have laws passed in the Indiana General Assembly which would grant railroad rights-of-way to adjoining landowners if 1) the landowners sought possession of the land and 2) if the abandoning railroad could not prove within a short time that it had clear title to the land in question. Such laws have since been invalidated by court judgments in various areas, but it is clear that the chaotic state of the title status associated with each individual parcel of land used for a railroad rights-of-way has caused a situation where the future use of a railroad right-of-way as a multi-use trail can be threatened.



Another problem that faces trail developers is environmental. Over a century or more of use, most railroads sprayed defoliants on their track and surrounding properties to keep weeds from deteriorating the track bed and to keep sight lines clear. Residues of these defoliants, which were made up of a number of known and unknown compounds over the years, still remain on rights-of-way, along with residual chemicals and compounds spilled from railroad freight cars in derailments or other accidents. This environmental issue is a major one, both from the point of view of bikeway development and from the perspective of developers and farmers who want this land for reuse. This problem has held up redevelopment of abandoned railroad rights-of-way, although it has probably worked more to the advantage of trail advocates than to reversionary landowners simply due to the nature of the desired reuse.



A third problem facing developers of abandoned rights-of-way as trails is continuity. Many rights-of-way that carried rail lines abandoned in the 1970s have seen many parcels of their rights-of-way sold, and later built across, making them unavailable for trail development today at anything but prohibitive cost. In other case, bridges carrying the now abandoned rail line over highways and waterways were removed and will have to be replaced. Another threat to bikeway development, however, is posed by the removal of aging bridges that carried major highways over the now abandoned railroad right-of-way. Removal of these old bridges, for safety or other purposes, results in a situation in which any trail built on the rail rights-of-way must now cross the highway at grade. If the highway is a busy

one, and especially if the highway is a limited access highway, this leads to a complete blockage of the trail at that point. Such a blockage will render most trails useless.

One method of preserving rail corridors as they become abandoned is a process called railbanking. Railbanking is a method by which lines proposed for abandonment can be preserved through interim conversion to trail use. Some railroad rights-of-way contain easements that revert back to adjacent landowners when abandonment takes place. However, if a line is railbanked, the corridor is treated as if it had not been abandoned, meaning all reversions that could break it up into smaller pieces are prevented. A railbanking petition must be filed with the Surface Transportation Board if a public or qualified private entity desires to preserve the corridor. This will insure, at the very least, a six-month delay in the sale of the property while the railroad negotiates with the petitioners.



B. Utility Corridors

In addition to the great advantages of converting trail corridors to multi-use trails, another concept centers on developing existing utility corridors. Like rail corridors, utility corridors, whether they provide for underground or above-ground facilities, provide a linear, mostly unobstructed and undeveloped corridor for trail development.



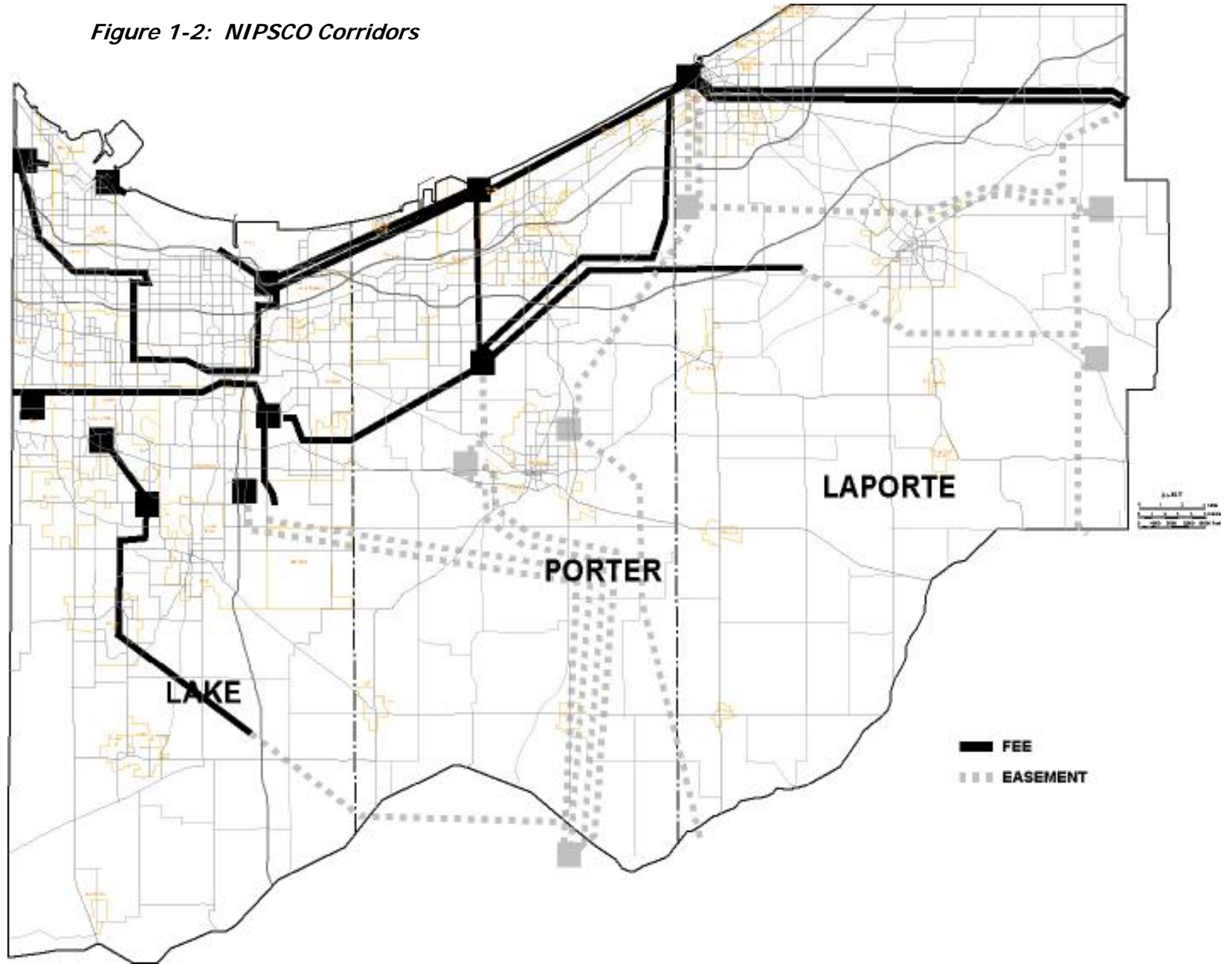
In the NIRPC region, the Northern Indiana Public Service Company, or NIPSCO, has been instrumental towards the development of new multi-use trails. In fact, as of 2010, more miles of off-road trails exist on property owned by NIPSCO than any other property. For starters, the entire length of the Erie-Lackawanna and Calumet Trails are within NIPSCO landholdings. In addition, future trails in Michigan City, Hammond, Griffith, Merrillville, and Hobart plan to utilize NIPSCO corridors.



Over the years, NIPSCO has refined their policy regarding trail development upon their corridors. This policy has emerged to give all potential trail managers consistent guidelines for use of a NIPSCO corridor. In order to secure a License Agreement for development of a trail, the local agency must agree to the following conditions:



Figure 1-2: NIPSCO Corridors



- 1) Assume all costs associated with utility inspections (replace trail).
- 2) Trail must be ten feet from all poles, towers, and anchor guy wires.
- 3) The maximum width of trail will be twelve feet.
- 4) Local agency must maintain and mow corridor where trail exists.
- 5) No parking areas to be permitted within corridor.
- 6) Acknowledgement of NIPSCO participation in trail development.



In comparison with the costs associated with obtaining a corridor through direct purchase, these conditions set by NIPSCO should be favorable to all local entities looking to develop a linear trail system. **Figure 1-2** shows the existing NIPSCO-owned or leased corridors in the NIRPC region.

NIPSCO is not the only utility company with corridor landholdings in Northwest Indiana. There are several other companies that maintain other electrical facilities and pipelines that could also serve as a prime corridor for trail development. However, NIPSCO has been by far the most proactive in terms of allowing trails on their property. To date, no other trails exist on utility corridors not owned by NIPSCO, but local entities should be aware of how these corridors bisect their community, and work with the utility companies on maintaining a free and clear right-of-way for future trail development.

C. Natural Features

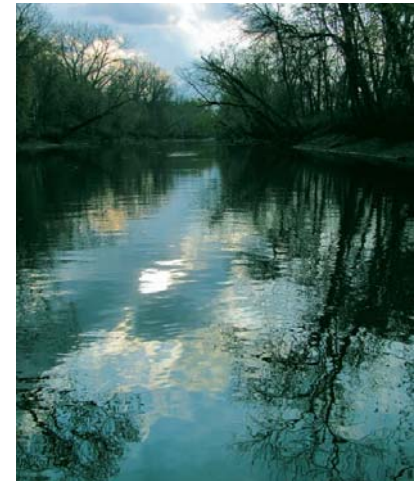
Another built-in corridor that could prove beneficial in establishing contiguous trail networks are those adjacent to natural features in the landscape. Specifically, waterways which are highly prevalent throughout the NIRPC region offer an excellent opportunity for fos-



tering greenways and providing a linear amenity for all visitors to enjoy and cherish. Other features such as wetlands and woodlots should be carefully inventoried by all communities for their connective value. Once planned correctly, these features can be incorporated into a land use plan that preserves their integrity amongst oncoming growth pressures. Furthermore, they can provide a community a significant cost savings by requiring the developer to donate the property to the city, which avoids acquisition costs. Of prime note are two significant river basin projects on the Kankakee and Little Calumet Rivers that plan to have an impact on the regional trail network. A general overview of the existing major waterways are shown in *Figure 1-3*. Please note that these are only the major hydraulic features, and are not exhaustive regarding all waterways in the region.

i. Kankakee Wide Levee Project

The Kankakee Wide Levee Project encompasses the section of the Kankakee River in Indiana from the Illinois State Line to St. Joseph County near South Bend. The Kankakee River Basin Commission (KRBC) was created in 1977 in response to flooding along the river and the mandate of the Indiana Flood Control Act. The KRBC has a master plan that was developed in 1989. The plan identifies alternatives for solving problems associated with flooding, drainage, and land use concerns within the floodplain of the river. The Master Plan proposes the development of wide levees on both the north and south side of the Kankakee River. The levees would begin near U.S. 30 at the LaPorte/Starke County Line and continue to the Illinois State Line. The levees will vary in height from two to eleven feet high. The planned benefits include the opportunities for expanded and new recreational facilities. A regional trail system is a major recreational component of the Master Plan and deserves serious consideration. A network of trails will provide easy access to points of interest along the river and link population centers with recreational areas in the vicinity of the Kankakee River. As a part of the Master Plan, three types of trail developments were identified. Trails





within the study area are proposed along existing roadways, abandoned railroad rights-of-way, and on top of the proposed wide levees. The tops of the levees that parallel either side of the river provide an excellent opportunity for the placement of walking, biking, or jogging trails. The recommendations from the Kankakee River Master Plan regarding trail/bikeways development include the following:



- Coordinate with county and state agencies to implement the recreation proposals within this plan.
- Acquire land for public recreation facility expansion as proposed in this Master Plan through easements, leases, right of first refusal, or fee simple acquisition.
- Assist and support private recreational development as outlined in this plan.
- Acquire easements and/or acquisition of right-of-way or regional trail system proposed in this plan.
- Coordinate final trail system location, funding, and acquisition with regional plan commissions, county park and recreational boards, Hoosier Trails Alliance, IDNR, and the Northwest Indiana Trails Alliance (NITA).
- Assist county and state agencies in pursuit of funding resources and applications for funding the acquisition, development, maintenance, and management of recreational facilities.
- Promote a new or expanded management plan for state recreational facilities within the project area.
- Promote and coordinate “prototype” projects eligible for Land and Water Conservation Funds with county and state agencies for environmentally-based recreation development.



ii. Little Calumet River Flood Control Project

The Little Calumet River Flood Control Project is a product of the Army Corps of Engineers. The purpose of the project is to provide flood damage reduction and enhanced recreation opportunities along the Little Calumet River from the Illinois State Line to Interstate 65 in the City of Gary. The project’s efforts consist of re-

placing existing spoil banks with new levees, floodwalls, closure structures, and drainage structures. Of note is that the project calls for a recreational trail as a part of the levee system. The levee width is planned to be ten feet to accommodate vehicular traffic as well as bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

The project is currently in the construction phase. Approximately 90% of the total project is complete. The project is divided into two sections. The East Reach, which is mainly in Gary, Indiana, extends from Cline Avenue to I-65. The West Reach covers the area from the Illinois/Indiana State Line to Cline Avenue. The construction of the project is divided into eight geographical stages, totaling over 27 construction contracts. As of the summer of 2010, the project was approximately 90% complete, with final completion scheduled for December 31, 2010. This timetable, however, reflects the completion of the flood control features. The missing recreational features will be completed as a follow-up project to the main task of completing the flood control infrastructure.

