

APPENDIX A:
Public Comment Report
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
December 2, 2014

In anticipation of updating the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP) as required by federal regulation, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) conducted a series of listening sessions to gain public input on the areas of motorized surface transportation, public transportation, and the environment and land use. This input will be used to inform the update process. A series of fifteen public meetings were held during September and October. The schedule was as follows:

Motorized Surface Transportation

- Thursday, September 18, 2014, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm & 4:00 pm-6:00 pm, Michigan City City Hall, 100 East Michigan Boulevard, Michigan City
- Wednesday, October 1, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm & 5:00 pm-7:00 pm, Merrillville Town Hall, 7820 Broadway, Merrillville
- Tuesday, October 21, 2014, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm & 4:00 pm-6:00 pm, Munster Town Hall, 1005 Ridge Road, Munster
- Wednesday October 22, 2014, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm & 4:00 pm-6:00 pm, Valparaiso Public Library, 103 Jefferson Street, Valparaiso

Public Transit

- Monday, September 22, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, Dyer-Schererville Public Library, 1001 W. Lincoln Highway, Schererville
- Wednesday, September 24, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, East Chicago Public Library Main Branch, 2401 E. Columbus Drive, East Chicago
- Monday, October 6, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, Crown Point Public Library, 122 N. Main Street, Crown Point
- Tuesday, October 7, 2014, 4:00 pm-6:00 pm, Adam Benjamin Metro Center, 100 W. 4th Avenue, Gary
- Tuesday, October 14, 2014, 5:30 pm-7:30 pm, Portage City Hall, 6070 Central Avenue, Portage
- Wednesday, October 15, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, Valparaiso City Hall, 166 Lincolnway, Valparaiso
- Thursday, October 16, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, La Porte City Hall, 801 Michigan Avenue, La Porte
- Thursday, October 16, 2014, 5:00 pm-7:00 pm, Michigan City City Hall, 100 East Michigan Boulevard, Michigan City
- Thursday, October 23, 2014, 4:00 pm-6:00 pm, Hammond Public Library, 564 State Street, Hammond

Environment

- Tuesday, September 16, 2014, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm, Room 002 of the Library-Student-Faculty Building at Purdue University North Central, US 421, Westville
- Wednesday, October 29, 2014, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm & 4:00 pm-6:00 pm, Merrillville Town Hall, 7820 Broadway, Merrillville

The 2040 CRP contains NIRPC's long range transportation plan, which federal regulations require be updated every four years.

Notification of the meetings was distributed to NIRPC's media contacts, as well as NIRPC's stakeholder and committee lists, including the Transportation Policy Committee and NIRPC Commission. Information was also distributed via the NIRPC website (www.nirpc.org) and NIRPC's social media outlets.

The comments received at the meetings as well as through other means such as the NIRPC comments email at comments@nirpc.org have been compiled into the following report.

NIRPC would also like to thank the public officials and transit operators who assisted staff at the meetings.

Environmental

The following comments were received during the environmental meetings at Purdue North Central on September 16, 2014 and Merrillville Town Hall on October 29, 2014.

Comment: Include Lake Michigan Coastal Program as an existing Program.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include the LMCP as an existing program in the CRP update.*

Comment: Include the number of communities that adopt/ implement model ordinances as a performance measure.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will work with the Pathway to 2040 committee to identify a feasible process to collect this information.*

Comment: Include Hazwopper training performed regionally as a management practice to prepare for possible pipeline failure into Lake Michigan.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will consider adding this as a BMP in a future update to the CRP. The current version of the CRP does not include information on environmental threats posed by pipelines.*

Comment: Include Gary interest in fishing pier.

NIRPC Response: *This could potentially be included in the Marquette Plan update but will not be incorporated into this CRP update.*

Comment: Include information on invasive species threats such as Emerald Ash Borer impacting woody debris into streams.

NIRPC Response: *Although an important topic, NIRPC does not currently have the capacity (staff knowledge) to address the invasive species issue in great detail. NIRPC will work with partners to determine if it is feasible to include the topic in the current CRP update.*

Comment: May want to include information from the Indiana State Forestry Action Plan.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will review the most current Indiana State Forestry Action Plan to identify elements to be included in the current CRP update.*

Comment: Include information on the urban forestry canopy assessment (taking place soon).

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include information from the assessment if it is completed in a timeframe that aligns with the current CRP update. If it is not NIRPC will consider adding information in a future update.*

Comment: Purdue University is currently studying all the BMPs Save the Dunes funded in the Salt Creek Watershed to see who is still maintaining them.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will consider including this information if the study is completed in a timeframe that aligns with the current CRP update. Most likely this would be done as a case study.*

Comment: Where is the information on the National Park Service land?

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC uses the "Managed Lands" GIS data collected and made available by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. This dataset includes land areas owned and managed by the NPS. NIRPC will include an update to this information if new data is available.*

Comment: Hammond removed several outfalls.

NIRPC Response: *The current CRP does not include information on NPDES permitted facilities or outfall structures and likely will not be included in the current update. This information is addressed at the municipal level through their MS4 programs, state Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) studies and local watershed management plans.*

Comment: Add Salt Creek watershed management plan is being updated by EPA.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include an update on local watershed planning efforts.*

Comment: Add East Branch Little Calumet River woody debris studies and Environmental Assessment (EA) to review stream use and management through the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will consider including these as case studies, however it is our understanding that neither of these studies have been completed at this time.*

Comment: Page III-20: Chesterton's Long Term Control Plans for CSOs has been approved.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will update the status of Combined Sewer Overflow Long Term Control Plans in the region to extent data is available from IDEM.*

Comment: Page III-58 Need to Update Statement about Save the Dunes watershed planning efforts to include the East Branch of the Little Calumet, including tributaries.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include an update on all local watershed planning efforts.*

Comment: Page III-10 Floodplains: FEMA recently updated floodplain maps in NWI.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include an update to the floodplain map in the CRP.*

Comment: Do we want to mention those communities that participate in the National Flood Insurance Program? They must adopt ordinances that protect flood plains from development.

NIRPC Response: *To the extent new information is available on requirements and participation in the National Flood Insurance Program, and resources permit we will consider how best to incorporate that information into the 2040 CRP, and whether that is best handled in the environment section.*

Comment: Page III-59: Should MS4 Erosion and Sediment Control for Construction Activities, as well as BMP performance criteria for post construction be added to the Storm Water Quality Manual Section, or the National Management Measures Section?

NIRPC Response: *Erosion and Sediment Control for Construction Activities have not been included as specific BMPS in the plan due to their temporary nature on the landscape. Supporting local governments to implement these activities in an implementation action identified in the current CRP and can be strengthened in the update.*

Performance criteria for Post-Development specific BMPs may be too detailed to include in the CRP given the resources available. However, supporting local governments understanding of these performance measures is an implementation action identified in the current CRP and could be strengthened in the update.

Comment: IDEM has a program for recycling that provides guidance & maybe funding for companies that want to use recyclable products to produce new consumer products. Should programs like this be included somewhere with the plan to enhance economic development/minimize environmental impacts? Maybe Chapter 4- Green jobs?

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will review this program and determine how it may be best incorporated into the 2040 CRP Update given resources available to us.*

Comment: Issues to consider including:

- In-lieu fee proposals for wetland mitigation

NIRPC Response: *The comment refers to a proposed addition to the Indiana Wetland Mitigation program allowing for wetland impacts to be mitigated through payment of fees to the state, as an option in addition to the current programs of on-site mitigation and wetland mitigation banking. The Us Army Corps of Engineers public comment period on this proposal closed on August 18, 2014. Should this program be approved prior to completion of the 2040 CRP Update, NIRPC will explore its relevance for incorporation as appropriate to the Environmental Mitigation process.*

- Waters of the United States rules proposed by EPA

NIRPC Response: *The comment refers to a rulemaking concerning clarification of the types of waters covered under the federal Clean Water Act. The rulemaking should not however broaden coverage or add new types of waters to those CWA jurisdiction, therefore it should not impact the environmental and natural resource basemap underscoring the Green Infrastructure or the Development Suitability maps presented in the 2040 CRP.*

- Indiana Chamber of Commerce Water Resources Study

NIRPC Response: *The comment refers to “Water and Economic Development in Indiana: Modernizing the State’s Approach to A Critical Resource”, a report published by the Indiana Chamber in August, 2014. NIRPC plans to incorporate key findings and relevant data from this report into the 2040 Update Water Supply section of Chapter 2.*

- DNR Water Conservation and Efficiency Rule

NIRPC Response: *The comment refers to IC 14 Section 4.2 Water Conservation and efficiency program, which was originally developed to meet the requirements of the Great Lakes Compact, but which is applied state wide. NIRPC can include a brief discussion of the goals and objectives of this program in the Water Withdrawal, Consumption and Supply section of Chapter 2 of the CRP, as well as recommend the model conservation ordinance provided by the DNR as an implementation tool. As resources and time permit, NIRPC will review the IDNR program information for any significant and relevant changes or new information since the 2011 publication of the 2040 CRP.*

Comment: Brownfields- Reach out to Jim VanderKloot with the USEPA Strong Cities Strong Communities Program at the City of Gary

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC plans to incorporate all of the progress and potential progress that have been underway in the area of brownfield cleanup and redevelopment into the CRP update. The Strong Cities Strong Communities program is an important part of this progress.*

Comment: Brownfields Job Training Program in Gary

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include reference to previous Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants completed by the City of Gary, as well as include the program as an ongoing implementation opportunity and recommendation.*

Comment: Climate Change-

- The Alliance for the Great Lakes has done work in Michigan City to map climate change valuable (vulnerable?) areas.

- Look at USACE Study- they discuss breakwater wall failure and more coastal storms as a result of climate change – they map the value of properties that would be impacted. (Great Michigan City Example)

NIRPC Response: *As time and resources permit, and if NIRPC can obtain data from the two projects mentioned, we will attempt to incorporate this into the existing CRP framework as appropriate.*

Comment: Solid Waste – Have you talked with Harvey Abramowitz at Purdue Calumet? He cites on different solid waste committees- also has done many local studies.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will pursue this recommendation as time and resources permit.*

Comment: Water Withdrawal – nice to talk about well testing weeks

NIRPC Response: *As time and resources permit, NIRPC will explore making recommendations about promotional well testing programs.*

Comment: Anything change due to Pratt Industries Expansion? This resulted in major updates to the Valparaiso Waste Water Treatment Plant?

NIRPC Response: *Pratt Industries Expansion and its relationship to water infrastructure capacity could be a good case study on the connection between water resources and economic development. NIRPC will try to include this in the 2040 CRP Update as time and resources permit.*

Comment: Natalie Johnson, Urban Waters Coordinator has latest stats for limited soil ratings of septic as well as other information about why it's important to maintain. Also Dunes Creek was targeted and not necessarily based on sound science- better explanation is needed.

NIRPC Response: *Thank you for volunteering Natalie! NIRPC will discuss ways to incorporate new information you may have available into the 2040 CRP Update as time and resources permit.*

Comment: Include information about the Jeorse Park Beach project and Deep River dam (Lake Station).

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will consider including information about the Jeorse Park Beach project as a potential case study. The Deep River dam study through the US Army Corps of Engineers is currently on hold due to lack of local matching funds to complete the study.*

Comment: Include information on septic study (focus groups).

NIRPC Response: *The study has not been completed at this time. NIRPC will however include information on the NWI Septic System Working Group.*

Comment: Include Urban Waters Federal Partnership in existing programs.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include this information in the CRP update.*

Comment: Include update to floodplain information.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC will include an update to the floodplain map in the CRP.*

Motorized Surface Transportation

The following comments were received during the motorized surface transportation meetings at Michigan City City Hall on September 18, 2014, Merrillville Town Hall on October 1, 2014, Munster Town Hall on October 21, 2014, and the Valparaiso Public Library on October 22, 2014.

Comment: We need to support the train, because if we want economic development and growth, we need to have those types of connections in our community.

NIRPC Response: *We agree—NIRPC supports the Westlake line. This commuter rail line has the potential to both reduce expected traffic congestion and encourage population growth in the areas served by the route that are outside of the urban core.*

Comment: There needs to be concern for/things to consider in terms of the proposed NICTD Expansion in Dyer such as location of the maintenance facilities.

NIRPC Response: *All construction-related aspects of the Westlake line will be known many years ahead of construction. Placement of maintenance and other facilities will be in/at locations that have been appropriately zoned by the local planning and zoning officials.*

Comment: If Main Street is connected to Joe Orr Road in Illinois, there is more work that needs to be done. There are still two lane sections between Calumet Avenue and Indianapolis Boulevard that would also need expansion in order to avoid becoming a bottleneck for traffic.

NIRPC Response: *We understand. NIRPC cannot independently dictate the construction of a roadway. The Main Street project in our transportation plan runs from the state line to Calumet Ave because those are the beginning and ending points specified by the Town of Munster in their request to us.*

Comment: Valparaiso University is planning a large expansion of its student population. Is NIRPC planning for this?

NIRPC Response: *Not really. Planning for additional road or transit services related to population shifts in group quarters (e.g., colleges, universities, prisons, etc.) is largely the responsibility of the host city. NIRPC would expect the city itself to address by bringing projects to NIRPC for funding.*

Comment: We should look at alternative modes such as an overhead monorail from Porter County airport to Gary Airport or even Midway. This could even have connections into GPTC's current Livable Broadway project.

NIRPC Response: *Construction of any new fixed guideway type of transit system requires years of planning and immense amounts of capital. In contrast, a bus rapid transit service is able to use existing roadways, can be implemented quickly, and operates at a fraction of the cost of a fixed guideway system. We can review other modes of public transit service, but until a dependable and permanent source of local for public transit is established, bus service remains the most cost-effective mode.*

Comment: Make sure that there is a system created to make sure that we are getting the most return for the dollars that we are investing. We should evaluate the cost effectiveness of projects to see what their economic impact is to make sure that we are getting the most bang for our buck.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC's transportation plan calls for the maintenance of the existing surface transportation network. However, transportation projects selected by NIRPC to construct or rehabilitate with federal funds are limited to those pre-identified road segments on the "Federal-Aid Highway System." Cost-effectiveness is a consideration when we select federally funded road projects. The current federal transportation authorizing statute (MAP-21) calls for the establishment of a data-driven, performance-based project selection.*

Comment: The true cost of environmental damages should be part of general considerations when planning and making transportation decisions.

NIRPC Response: *Each federal aid project selected is subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A NEPA review and clearance (by the State and Federal officials) is required at the design stage. Conducting a detailed environmental impact assessment prior to our selection of the project for funding would impose an undue financial burden on sponsors. It could, however, be included as part of the NEPA process.*

Other comment received outside of meetings

Comment: We were pleased to see the recent support for the Illiana Expressway in the 2040 Plan. We feel this will address the safety and traffic flow for the east/west traffic in the region, and promote economic growth. We also support the 45th Avenue/Calumet Ave improvement in the 2040 plan. The positive impact this improvement would have on both north-south and east-west travel and safety, along with eliminating the rail crossing safety issues and traffic delay concerns, and quality of life will have a very positive impact on Munster and the surrounding communities.

There are many areas of need, and we understand that planning is not just static, but dynamic, and as needs change, both long term and short term plans must be looked at throughout the entire area serviced by your office.

Given that, we would ask you to revisit the Main Street project located in Munster currently included in your 2040 plan, and strongly support that Main Street Extension should be eliminated from your 2040 plan.

We have lived in various cities and towns while a resident and taxpayer in Northwest Indiana (including Munster), so we have experienced first-hand traffic and residential quality of life living in these different communities. While we feel the expense to improve the Calumet/45th street intersection is justified, we feel this improvement also makes the Main Street project not needed at all. Also, why should our resources support a project with negative benefits to local residents, when there are other projects with positive benefit in other parts of the county and northwest Indiana?

Besides being an unnecessary expense, the Main Street Extension is one that many local residents do not want. Having attended information meetings on this project, including one at the Dyer Town Hall, where the meeting room was packed over capacity, with residents not just from Dyer, but also Munster, opposed to this project. Hopefully those from your office updated you with all of the concerns expressed at that meeting, including traffic concerns this would add to the surrounding area, additional rail crossing now added along with the safety and traffic bottleneck it would add to the system, environmental concerns, safety, school bus delays, airport concerns, quality of life, elimination of scarce green-space, and other issues and concerns voiced at that meeting. Unlike the 45th/Calumet, which improves on an existing route, eliminates rail crossing issues, and has residential support from residents in the immediate and surrounding areas, this Main Street extension would eliminate another open-area/green-space in the northern part of the county, and create undue harm to the quality of life to the many living in that area, along with adding no benefit and taking the place of more pressing needs in the Northwestern Indiana Region.

The burden on the local residents with additional traffic along Main Street from Calumet Avenue to Indianapolis Blvd would also be created. In addition, 45th Street will now be a better east -west route connecting to the 80/94 at Cline and going beyond Colfax if needed, unlike Main Street which dead ends. Using existing Burnham Avenue would easily make that connection to 45th if it was still determined the additional connection was to be needed.

There has also been articles in the Times indicating that if the Main Street extension is added, Illinois communities that are looking to have casino gambling down the road see the Main Street extension as an opportunity to draw casino dollars from Northwest Indiana casinos, money that is spent on infrastructure and other quality of life improvements in Northwest Indiana.

James & Sara Saltanovitz

NIRPC Response: *The Main Street extension project from the State Line to Indianapolis Boulevard will remain as a “committed” project in our long range transportation plan. Being so included should not be confused with a selection, by NIRPC, to receive federal funds for construction (it hasn’t). This project will need to compete for the opportunity to be allocated federal construction dollars. The next window of opportunity for funding will be in 2019. Then, Munster may or may not choose to submit the project for funding consideration.*

Munster has the option of pursuing a connection of 45th Street with Glenwood-Lansing Road at or near Calumet Avenue instead of improving Main Street.

Our long range transportation plan indicates near-gridlock conditions for all east-west roadways crossing the State Line by 2040. Either of the above noted projects will address this condition.

Comment: I am writing to say that I feel the Main Street extension connecting Joe Orr Road in Illinois to Main Street in Munster, Indiana is a complete waste of time and money, not to mention the environmental impact it will have to the residences along this corridor. I feel this project should be removed from any future consideration and I appreciate your time.

Regards,
Jeff Van Hecke

NIRPC Response: *Please refer to the prior response.*

Public Transportation

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at Dyer-Schererville Library on September 22, 2014.

Comment: The South Shore Line is too far/too difficult to get to from Dyer area. The service can be inconsistent, and couldn't be depend on to get to work on time. The South Shore Line needs to go to where the people are moving. There should be later weekday trains for people going to events like concerts, even special service when these events are scheduled. The extension of the South Shore Line would be a great thing.

NIRPC Response: *Planning for the extension of the South Shore is underway. It is a highlight of the 2040 CRP. The recommendation for later trains for special events will be passed on to NICTD.*

Comment: There are so many fiefdoms in this area, and everyone is more concerned with their own interests rather than those of the region as a whole.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC as a regional body works to bring the region together.*

Comment: What are INDOT's plans for the intersection of 231 & 41?

NIRPC Response: *This was referred to INDOT.*

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at the East Chicago Public Library on September 24, 2014.

Comment: Would love to have better bus service to connect between towns and Chicago.

NIRPC Response: *Support for a connected system will be expressed in the update to the Plan.*

Comment: How is Section 5307 used? What is the criteria for these transit systems getting the money?

NIRPC Response: *Section 5307 funds are prioritized using criteria based on the goals and objectives listed in the 2040 CRP.*

Comment: Are factors such as the number of people with disabilities in a system's area considered?

NIRPC Response: *The number of people, riders, elderly and disabled are considered in the federal funding formula that distributes what Congress appropriates annually. While we can get more federal money, problem is rooted in the lack of local match. Operators do not have enough.*

Comment: Is anyone using Lake County income tax or advocating for its use for transit?

NIRPC Response: *Not so far. Elected leaders are the ones that control the funds. It can be done...the V-Line and Chicago Dash in Valparaiso are both examples.*

Comment: Busses can be unpredictable, and it makes it hard to rely on them for getting to jobs.

NIRPC Response: *Reliability of the transit system is critical. Improvements to reliability may be emphasized in the criteria.*

Comment: Safety of the system (stops especially) is a factor to be considered as well.

NIRPC Response: *Improvements to safety are also critical needs. Criteria will be reviewed for emphasis.*

Comment: It can be confusing to deal with the disparity in fares between operators. For example, ECPT is free, but the Gary bus requires payment.

NIRPC Response: *The need to improve rider education will be conveyed to the operators.*

Comment: The customer service experience can be lacking and confusing. You get passed around to multiple people at multiple numbers and no one seems to care if there is a problem.

NIRPC Response: *Improving customer relations will be addressed with the operators. Staff will be sure to talk with ECPT regarding the erratic service and find out what is going on.*

Comment: The bus needs to connect well with the South Shore Line.

NIRPC Response: *This recommendation will be passed on to East Chicago Transit for further consideration.*

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at the Crown Point Public Library on October 6, 2014.

Comment: It's nice that there is some transit in the region, but it could really use improvement.

NIRPC Response: Improvements to the existing services is a high priority of the 2040 plan.

Comment: Northwest Indiana Community Services provided a good service, but the court order made it impractical and now it has been lost. When Crown Point tried to implement some sort of bus service, the meetings were so unruly that nothing got done and the state walked away. Have had several people give stories of not being able to work because of lack of transportation that provides access to jobs. Loss of regional bus system was a disaster. Biggest hurdle for bringing in new jobs is transportation.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 Plan identifies the need for a regional public transit system that better connects people with jobs and other desired locations and supports the creation of regional source of funding to implement such a system.*

Comment: The Town of Merrillville has been deferring any responsibility for transportation onto Ross Township. Municipalities must also consider changing demographics of the community (income, etc). If you are going to accept these new members of the community, then you should also be willing to provide the services that they require. Quality of life issue. Divisions (Town organization) can be frustrating and confusing. Timeframe for meetings can make it hard to get to town council meetings, etc.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 Plan will continue to identify and prioritize an improved public transit system that supports the travel needs of the region. Continued conversations with your elected officials are highly recommended.*

Comment: How can the three counties work together to provide the needed services to all three? Is this a possibility?

NIRPC Response: *With the current state of things, that is not a possibility, but it does not eliminate the possibility of it happening in the future. When the RBA existed, both Lake and Porter belonged to it, so it has happened and can happen again.*

Comment: Is it possible for there to be longer hours? What has to happen?

NIRPC Response: It costs money. Federal and local funds are needed to hire additional drivers to operate over the longer hours.

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at the Gary Public Transportation Corporation's offices in the Gary Metro Center on October 7, 2014.

Comment: The current GPTC system is poor. Timing (buses run every hour), routes, and a poor Saturday schedule make it difficult to do things like go to Chicago. It is hard to use when you're working, and it can take away from what you enjoy doing. It's good to have SOME bus service rather than none, but there could still be improvements.

NIRPC Response: *Comments referred to GPTC. However, it must be noted that GPTC faces the same financial constraints as do other public bodies who rely on the property tax.*

Comment: There are a lot of people going into Chicago for work, and sometimes those jobs go late. Transit timing - both train and bus - can make such a job difficult or even impossible to maintain. South Bend Airport can be a good model to strive toward in continuing to improve Metro Center and the connections and services that are provided. Metro Center is a good asset, but improvements can always be considered.

NIRPC Response: *Improving connectivity between modes was also noted in East Chicago. NICTD and GPTC will be informed of the comments. Improved connectivity will be a focus of the updated Plan.*

Comment: Elected officials should be attending these meetings as well to hear this input themselves and to support their positions.

NIRPC Response: *It's also important for transit supporters to speak at city and town council meetings and at the county council and Board of Commissioners' meetings.*

Comment: Bus service also needed on Sunday for everything for church to jobs. People have things to do and places to go. Not having transportation on Sunday is a concern and can cause complications for riders and their plans.

NIRPC Response: *Comments referred to GPTC. However, it must be noted that GPTC faces the same financial constraints as do other public bodies who rely on the property tax.*

Comment: I am happy that the complimentary paratransit is being expanded and that it's available to use.

NIRPC Response: *Complementary paratransit is a critical component of the transit system.*

Comment: Audio prompts are needed for the busses to make it easier for the blind to use the transit system. Knowing what the stops are as you are going and what bus it is as they pull up would be very helpful and make riding easier.

NIRPC Response: *Comment will be forwarded to GPTC. Improving accessibility of the transit system is a major goal of the 2040 Plan.*

Comment: Can GPTC possibly work with the Blind Social Center on Broadway in Gary and make it possible for the regular bus to also stop there to lessen the need for complementary paratransit? Center staff are providing transportation with personal vehicles in some cases. Better connections to Chicago, Hammond and East Chicago are also needed.

NIRPC Response: *GPTC staff noted the potential for using the Lakeshore Connector and Lakeshore South as ways to connect. GPTC will work with the Center for additional service improvements.*

Comment: Drivers can be insensitive to some of the riders. Sensitivity training may need to be revisited.

NIRPC Response: *GPTC staff recommended that whenever there is an issue, please be sure to report it so the details can be determined and the problem pinpointed.*

Comment: Can the vans possibly also be retrofitted with the audio system?

NIRPC Response: *GPTC staff responded that that is something that would need to be looked into because the vans are sometimes substituted onto the fixed routes.*

Comment: Are there connections from Gary to Portage?

NIRPC Response: *Opportunity Enterprises goes west into Lake County as far as Broadway, and as far south as 109th Avenue, but it does cost more to use OE as they are not as highly subsidized.*

Comment: Is there a way to get reimbursed for trips not taken or at least credited to a future ride on OE?

NIRPC Response: *OE staff responded that OE does not have a system of pre-paid rides. Instead, the fare is charged when the trip is actually taken.*

Comment: We need more funding for GPTC.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 Plan supports the creation of a regional transit system funded by a dedicated source of local funds to match federal and state money.*

Comment: The hourly schedule can make it difficult. Passengers would like to see service extended to 10 pm as it would help facilitate access to jobs, at the mall for example.

NIRPC Response: *Comments referred to GPTC. However, it must be noted that GPTC faces the same financial constraints as do other public bodies who rely on the property tax.*

Comment: Seniors need transportation. GPTC is a lifeline for a lot of people to get anywhere and be able to get done what they need to get done. Not everyone can afford cars, and those outside of the service area of transit are forced to get cars or figure something else out.

NIRPC Response: *The need for transit is well established in the three-county area. The major obstacle is a regional source of funding to dedicate to local match for the federal and state funds, which are not sufficient to fund a system totally.*

Comment: The developments at Gary Airport and in University Park are good, but busses will be needed for it too.

NIRPC Response: *GPTC staff indicated that improved services to the airport are possible if passenger service returns. The University Park development does include a transit component.*

Comment: There could be a potential impact soon if there are changes or elimination in the school busses provided for children to get to and from school.

NIRPC Response: *This is a pending issue which the Gary Community School Corporation must address.*

Comment: Metro Center is a good asset. It's nice that there is somewhere to come into and wait and have this place that provides connections in the community so that it's not always necessary to go to Chicago. Thankful that there is still a bus service in the city for people to use. If there was easier transportation across county lines, it would help people to get better access to jobs there as well (in places such as Portage).

NIRPC Response: *Jobs access is an area needing major improvement for many people who don't drive. The update to the 2040 Plan will reflect this.*

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at Portage City Hall on October 14, 2014.

Comment: The Mayor's Senior Citizen Advisory Committee has identified providing public transit as its highest priority.

NIRPC Response: *This is a great first step in creating a system. The needs in Portage have long been identified. [Portage is recommended as a service area for a local system that could interconnect with Valparaiso for a more regional approach in Porter County.*

Comment: It would be good to have a point where riders of a potential Portage or Hobart system could transfer from one system to the other.

NIRPC Response: *Such connections would be an integral part of a regional system.*

Comment: Porter/Starke Services is slowly building its clientele without transportation, but there are several people who could use the services if they had transportation.

NIRPC Response: *Staff asked if the agency could use a fixed route system and recommended contacting the V-Line in Valparaiso. The transportation culture in Valparaiso with the V Line is now such that entities like Porter/Starke can depend on it and encourage its use for its clients.*

Comment: Transit linkages are needed between Bonner Senior Center and Porter Regional Hospital. There is some demand for affordable and senior housing in Portage and Portage Township, and it is growing. Transit isn't just for older people, but for younger people as well. We need to see a shift in mindset in Porter County that transit is a good thing and something worth having. We need to teach people how to use the transit and take the mystery and fear out of the service that exists.

NIRPC Response: *Public education on the importance of transit is part of the solution, as is raising a dedicated source of local matching funds. Travel training is another element that could improve the use of existing services and will be supported in the updated Plan.*

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at Valparaiso City Hall on October 15, 2014.

Comment: The V-Line is complicated to use and changing buses is a problem.

NIRPC Response: *Better travel training can be done. It is possible to do a regional training program to improve coordination and accessibility.*

Comment: Some low-vision people have been denied rides on PCACS.

NIRPC Response: *PCACS Director Bruce Lindner explained about the loss of some funding which resulted in a loss of capacity. Also, they have a “no-show” policy after 3 missed appointments that prohibits use for a limited amount of time.*

Comment: Will the capacity go back up?

NIRPC Response: *If the funding is restored, service could be increased.*

Comment: Service to Portage and Chesterton is needed.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 Plan supports an interconnected system of service for Porter County. A source of local funding is needed.*

Comment: How can I get to the V-Line if I live outside the city limits?

NIRPC Respond: *PCACS Director Bruce Lindner recommended using either his or OE demand response ride to the City.*

Comment: Sunday service and service to the new hospital are needed.

NIRPC Response: *V-Line staff noted that service to the hospital is being reviewed in the course of the route study Valparaiso is just completing. The recommendation for Sunday service will be forwarded to the City.*

Comment: How does one use the V-Line deviated route?

NIRPC Response: *V-Line staff explained the procedure for making a request for deviation 24 hours in advance of the ride.*

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at La Porte City Hall on October 16, 2014.

No comments were made in La Porte.

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at Michigan City City Hall on October 16, 2014.

Comment: What is happening with the 11th Street Station? Will there be speed improvements to reduce travel time to Chicago?

NIRPC Response: *NICTD staff Joe Crnkovich responded that the 11th St. Station would be the consolidated station with a full-length high level platform. The goal is to shorten travel time to under two hours with the potential to increase speeds to 90 mph in the country.*

Comment: Hope that there is some merit given to being innovative for adding projects to the plan. Try to push the envelope.

NIRPC Response: *The current 2040 CRP contains some visionary projects. New projects may be added so recommendations are welcome.*

Comment: What about consideration for high speed rail?

NIRPC Response: *High speed and traditional intercity passenger rail is something that NIRPC is keeping a close eye on as projects progress. Changes have been happening the past couple years with Amtrak's existing Hoosier State service from Chicago to Indianapolis, while other projects such as Michigan DOT's high speed rail project, which will come through Northwest Indiana, is also important to the future of passenger rail in Northwest Indiana. NIRPC will continue to participate in high speed rail initiatives and inform local transit operators of future multi-modal connections.*

The following comments were received during the public transportation meeting at the Hammond Public Library on October 23, 2014.

Comment: Public transit needs to come back to Hammond. I want the bus back in Hammond like it was three years ago. We need the funding to continue so Hammond does not lose service again. They should try contacting big employers to see if they would contribute.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 Plan identifies the need for a regional public transit system that better connects people with jobs and other desired locations and supports the creation of regional source of funding to implement such a system. The 2040 Plan will continue to identify and prioritize an improved public transit system that supports the travel needs of the region. Continued conversations with your elected officials are highly recommended.*

Partnerships are one way to fund certain types of public transit and should be considered and explored where possible.

Comment: We want service to the north side of town and Whiting.

NIRPC Response: *GPTC has proposed a route to serve that area. A request for local funding to match federal and state funds has been made and is under consideration. The 2040 Plan update will support and recommend expanded and improved fixed route service across the urbanized area.*

Comment: We must now walk over a mile just to access the Gary buses.

NIRPC Response: *GPTC staff were present and took note of the comment. While expanding the service is the preferred solution, funding must first be identified and committed to.*

Comment: It's hard to do basic things like shopping for groceries or other items. Trips can require multiple legs and connections across multiple providers to go to places that previously only required a trip on one route.

NIRPC Response: *The loss of the Regional Bus Authority service was the result of the lack of an agreed-to dedicated source of local funding. The funds initially provided by the Regional Development Authority were only meant to be for a limited time. While it was demonstrated to be a highly successful service, the lack of sustainable long-term local funding caused it to end. The 2040 Plan update will continue to recommend and support a regional system of transit that better serves all trip purposes.*

The following comments were received on the topic of public transportation via telephone on NIRPC's public comment phone line at 219-763-6060, ext. 160.

Comment: I know this isn't your jurisdiction, but we really, really, really need a Greyhound Bus station in Hammond. I've had to quit going to see my son in Michigan because I have no way of getting there. I can't go to Gary or Chicago to get a Greyhound bus. Please, please, please bring back the Greyhound bus station and make the Amtrak station in Hammond easier for us to able to get out there. Let the station be open.

NIRPC Response: *Inter-city and overland bus services are an important part of the regional public transit package. Baran's Bus has started operating in northwest Indiana and may provide a link to Greyhound. The City of Hammond is also working with GPTC to re-open the Rabin Plaza transit station.*

Comment: All communities need public transportation, especially Chesterton which doesn't have any. The older senior citizens, a lot of them don't have cars like me, and I'm 80 now. I have trouble getting to the store or getting somebody to take you there. It's about time they do something in these towns where we pay our taxes. Thank you.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 update will continue to advocate for and support a sustainable source of local funding to implement transit services to meet the needs of seniors as well as the youth, disabled, those without cars, and those who would just like to take transit.*

The following comments were discussed with a staff person on the phone rather than left in a verbatim message.

Comment: The caller was frustrated and angry over the lack of transportation for demand response users. More money is needed for more drivers and vehicles because the caller had to arrange a ride on PCACS a month in advance if a ride is needed. The V-Line doesn't go to the Senior Center in Valparaiso. The caller does appreciate that the V-Line and PCACS staff are very receptive to the calls the caller makes.

NIRPC Response: *The 2040 Plan supports and will continue to support the creation of a regional system that would address these issues. The funding mechanisms for public transit were explained as well as the need for local resources. The caller was encouraged to contact local elected officials about increasing local support.*