

Appendix B: Public Involvement.

Public Comment Summary Report (08/29/2013)

Public Comment Summary Report¹²

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

August 29, 2013

Documents (3)

1. "Air Quality Conformity Determination between the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan, as amended, the Fiscal Year 2014 to 2017 Transportation Improvement Program, as amended, and the Indiana State Implementation Plan for Air Quality (SIP)"
2. "Amendment #2 to the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan"
3. "Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties, Indiana for 2014-2017"

Public Comment Period(s) Conducted:

For Documents #1 and #3:

The public comment period began on Wednesday, July 3, 2013 and ended on Friday, August 23, 2013. Duration: 52 days.

For Document #2

The public comment period began on Wednesday, July 10, 2013 and ended on Friday, August 23, 2013. Duration: 42 days.

Public Meetings Conducted: One (for all three documents):

Wednesday, August 21, 2013

Gary Public Library, Kennedy Branch, 3953 Broadway Gary (1pm to 4pm)

¹ This document will be included in the adopted and published Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as Appendix B

² Accepted by voice vote of a majority of Commissioners.

Comments Received:

1. Comment Date: July 17, 2013

Comment: NIRPC has not conducted the formal public meeting required by the FTA Planning Regulations.

Response: The FHWA/FTA Planning Regulations, at 450.324(b), do require such a meeting. We delayed the adoption of the TIP until after the public meeting had been held. The public comment period was extended for all three subject documents and the required meeting was held on Wednesday, August 21, 2013.

(It is acknowledged that NIRPC did not comply with the 30-day advance notice to correspondents identified in NIRPC's 2006 consent decree.)³

2. Comment Date: July 18, 2013

Comment: At the NIRPC Board meeting, staff did not distribute, to the audience, paper copies of the documents to be considered by the Board.

Response: NIRPC Board members are provided copies of documents in advance of their meeting. Staff believes that it is both important and appropriate, at least in the case of these three documents, to distribute paper copies at the meeting at which the Board will adopt them. This increases transparency and promotes a fuller understanding of our processes and procedures.

3. Comment Date: July 25, 2013

Comment: Main Street should be eliminated from your 2040 plan, and not be done at all.

Response: Roadway capacity-increasing projects are included in our transportation plan because the sponsoring unit of government has 1) requested the inclusion of the project in our plan, 2) the project has cleared our Congestion Management Process (CMP), 3) the project has cleared our Environmental Justice analysis, 4) the project, when added to the existing network in our transportation model, does not cause total emissions to exceed the limits imposed by the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality (SIP), and 5) the project has been found to be generally

³ This statement, contained in the accepted version, was afterward determined to be incorrect. The notice to correspondents (i.e., plaintiffs) required by the Consent Decree was found to have been issued.

compliant with the goals and objectives of our plan. The comment has been forwarded to the Town of Munster for consideration.

4. Comment Date: July 25, 2013

Comment: The Illiana Expressway should be added to the 2040 plan.

Response: NIRPC has been requested by the project sponsor (INDOT) to add this project to our plan. We are handling this request using the five-step process indicated in our response to Comment #3.

5. Comment Date: July 16, 2013

Comment: Porter (Town) does not want to reduce the lane count on SR49.

While we would love to see an improvement of the 49/20 interchange, we do not want it at the expense of creating a local road out of 49.

Response: The Conformity Determination and Plan Amendment include a travel lane reduction project on SR 49 between US 20 and US 12. The TIP does not include the construction project. NIRPC will sponsor a meeting of stakeholders in this corridor to learn what roadway changes, if any, are needed in this location.

Comments Received at the Formal Public Meeting 8/21/2013

The 450.324(b) formal public meeting was conducted as an open house on August 21, 2013 at the Kennedy Branch of the Gary Public Library. The three subject documents of this report, Air Quality Conformity Determination, a pending amendment to NIRPC's 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan, and the FY 2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) were summarized, along with proposed Amendment #1 to the TIP (that is included in independent, and overlapping 30-day public comment period⁴).

A PowerPoint presentation was given by NIRPC Executive Director Ty Warner and Transportation Projects Manager Gary Evers, providing attendees with a basic overview of NIRPC and its work and an explanation of the four documents that were out for public comment. This presentation was followed by a question and answer period. Comments and responses from that question and answer period are summarized following.

⁴ Amendment #1, which contains 202 public transit projects, is scheduled for NIRPC Board consideration in September 2013.

6. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: In terms of transit, what are specific plans for Hammond?

Response: North Township's Demand Response service, and GPTC investments into their services within Hammond, including the Tri-City Corridor are included in the proposed TIP. There are no firm plans under development at this time to restore fixed route bus service to Hammond.

7. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: Why were there no hard copies of the documents to review?

Response: Staff erred in not distributing paper copies of the subject documents at the public meeting. We apologized and indicated that we would revise our policy and practice. It was stated that the documents remain posted in text and pdf format on the NIRPC website. (See also our response to Comment #2)

8. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: What mailing lists were used to contact people and distribute information on the open houses⁵?

Response: The following computerized lists were used in informing the public of the three open house meetings. See also our response to Comment #9.

- Ped, Pedal, & Paddle Committee Members
- ADA Master Contact List
- College Contact Listings
- Commission Meeting Notification List
- NIRPC Commissioner Roster
- Commissioners on TPC – 2013
- Disability
- Disability Community
- EMPC (Environmental Management Policy Committee)
- Human Rights Councils
- Land Use Committee

⁵ Refers to the August 21 Meeting held regarding the Conformity Determination, Plan Amendment, TIP, and TIP Amendment #1—as well as two meetings being conducted as Open Houses for just TIP Amendment #1. There was also a press release issued for the three events.

- Libraries in Northwest Indiana
- Local Government Assistance Advisory Committee
- Mayors' Councils on Disability, Human Right Commissions, DAV, NAACP
- Media List 2013
- Outreach Contacts from December 2008
- Pathway to 2040 Implementation Committee
- Towns and Smaller Cities (TASC)
- TPC Contacts 1
- TPC Contacts 2
- TPC Contacts 3
- TPC Agenda Mailing List

9. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: NIRPC is missing at least 20 key Gary community organizations from its lists. NIRPC needs to be better about contacting community organizations.

Response #1: We can always use assistance from our partners throughout the region in making sure that our lists are inclusive as possible. If you know of any that are not currently included, please let us know so we can make contact and add them.

Response #2: Notwithstanding the above, NIRPC is very much committed to maintaining current, up-to-date stakeholder contact information. We have a staff-level IT working group looking into effective, low-cost solutions for managing snail mail (USPS) data and e-mail addresses, as well as social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.). We must quickly adapt to the changing communications culture of our citizens.

10. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: NIRPC's mailing lists need to be organized.

Response #1: We are trying to do that.

Response #2: We agree. See our response to Comment #9.

11. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: How do we know our comments have been noted?

Response: By attending the August 29th meeting of the NIRPC Commission. A public comment summary report (i.e., this document) will be prepared and put before our board on the 29th.

12. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: Who will determine if the comments are significant?

Response: The NIRPC Commission will make that determination.

13. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: Meetings at NIRPC are hard to get to without an automobile. Better transit options are needed.

Response #1: Comments from the public on these kinds of matters are appreciated and always welcome.

Response #2: Regarding the need for better transit options, NIRPC can only do so much in promoting the retention and expansion of existing public transit services within the region. Local units of government create, continue, or terminate public transit services, we believe, in response to local political and fiscal realities.

Response #3: NIRPC's draft Public Participation Plan proposes to use variable meeting locations for its Transportation Policy Committee and real-time web-casting with interactive features. As noted in Response #2 to Comment #9, we must quickly adapt to new technologies that our citizens are using and not be fearful of doing so.

14. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: What is the difference between a hearing and an open house?

Response: A public hearing is a legal meeting which is required to be conducted by the General Assembly, Congress, the judiciary, or other similar authority. Indiana law requires that a legal notice be provided in a certain way for a hearing. During the course of a hearing, the party conducting the hearing can only listen and not respond.

An open house is a less-formal type of public meeting. The open house format allows NIRPC to respond to questions and comments posed on the spot. This format also permits most attendees to leave the meeting with their questions answered.

15. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: When are people going to see concrete progress from all of these plans?

Response: We are already seeing progress from previous TIPs, such as new bridges at Buffington Harbor, rebuilt Ridge Road & Broadway intersection (2007 TIP), and Gary has rebuilt Grant Street.

16. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: What are the numbers of different types of projects?

Response: We responded with information from one of the PowerPoint slides:

INDOT Highway Projects:	301 projects
Regional Highway Projects:	121 Projects
Bicycle/Pedestrian Projects:	56 projects
Carryover Public Transit:	60 projects
National Lakeshore Projects:	2 projects

17. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: Why does it seem to take so long for projects to get done?

Response: A construction project typically takes 5-6 years to compete from initial project proposal to completion of construction. This can be for a variety of reasons, such as the environmental impact study or right-of-way acquisition.

18. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: With the highest population density being in Lake County, why is more money not being given to transit in Lake County?

Response: Federal money doesn't pay all of the bills. A bigger investment is needed on the part of local entities in transit as well as other infrastructure such as sidewalks.

19. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: What is in the TIP to create a cohesive regional transit system?

Response #1: That is not the purpose of the TIP. That is the purpose of the long range transportation plan.

Response #2: The TIP is a short-term spending plan for federal surface transportation funds—it is not in and of itself a plan.

Please see also Response #2 to Comment #13

20. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: What is NIRPC doing to implement the long range plan's call for a better regional transit system?

Response: This will be a topic for the 2015 update of the long range plan. However, how to respond to this call largely rests with the public transit operators. Local communities have to have the desire to provide transit service and support it with their local tax and farebox dollars. Local buy-in is critical. The new Lake County income tax might provide an opportunity for more public transit funding.

21. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: The meeting location did not appear to meet ADA accessibility standards.

Response #1: We agree. No future meetings will be held in this location. We will utilize the Miller branch library or other accessible locations for future meetings in Gary.

22. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: I would like to obtain copies of documents in Microsoft Word and Excel, or braille. How do I do this?

Response #1: We will transmit the documents in the requested Microsoft formats.

23. Comment Date: August 21, 2013

Comment: The lapsed ADA complementary paratransit credentials of a customer of the late Regional Bus Authority's Hammond-area service

prevented this person from accessing similar services in Baltimore, MD. This person posed two questions: 1) Where is the medical information that was provided to RBA, and 2) How do I renew my credentials?

Response #1: We do not know the specific location of the medical information. We believe that it, along with other official records of the RBA, were sealed and delivered to a branch of state government in Indianapolis. We can attempt to find out and communicate what information we find.

Response #2: Depending upon where you reside, you should re-register for complementary paratransit service with Gary PTC, East Chicago Transit, Chicago Transit Authority or PACE.

Other Comments Received

24. Comment Date: August 22, 2013

Comment: "On August 21, 2013 I attended the NIRPC open house in Gary Indiana. I learned that this is a very important endeavor for all the people of Northwest Indiana. **Your presentation was very brief and without any printed material** to take to my organization. I learned more from talking to Ty Warner before the program started than the program itself.

The future of the Miller Business Association, Miller Beach Arts and Creative District, and the economic development of the Miller beach community as a whole **depend on public transportation**. Most important **is raised platforms at a minimum at the South Shore Station at Lake Street. The South Shore Station must stay at Lake Street.** It is the entrance to the new arts district which Chicago-land day visitors can walk to the most beautiful public beaches in the Midwest and enjoy the Indiana Lake Shore National Park.

Bike paths seem to stop half way through Miller. Whatever the reason is, it is necessary to solve the problem so that the bike path can continue West through some of the most beautiful landscapes of the National Park. It looks like NIRPC controls the direction of transportation in Northwest Indiana and we are ready to help NIRPC in any way we can."

Response (Issued 08/22/2013): "Thank you for your comments regarding the August 21, 2013 open house at the Kennedy Branch of the Gary Public Library. We sincerely apologize for the oversight in not having a printed copy of the materials prepared. An electronic copy of the 2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for highway projects, along with an interactive version of the map board you saw yesterday, can be found here: [http://www.nirpc.org/resources-info/news/2014-2017-transportation-improvement-program-\(tip\)-open-for-public-comment.aspx](http://www.nirpc.org/resources-info/news/2014-2017-transportation-improvement-program-(tip)-open-for-public-comment.aspx) An electronic version of the TIP Amendment #1 containing regional transit projects can be found here: [http://www.nirpc.org/resources-info/news/2014-2017-tip-amendment-1-\(transit\)-open-for-public-comment.aspx](http://www.nirpc.org/resources-info/news/2014-2017-tip-amendment-1-(transit)-open-for-public-comment.aspx)"

"As was stated yesterday, NIRPC agrees that the state of public transit in Northwest Indiana needs to be improved, and we support efforts to that end. In terms of the South Shore Line service in Miller specifically, sharing your concerns with NICTD as the operator of the service is important to do as well as they are the ones who develop their plans for the service, including improvements such as high-level platforms. NIRPC is also proud of Northwest Indiana's growing system of trails and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. As far as the state of trails in Miller specifically, our non-motorized planner Mitch Barloga might be a good source of information. He can be contacted at mbarloga@nirpc.org. A multi-modal transportation system is important for creating and maintaining vibrant communities within our region, and the concerns you have stated are valid ones. It is something that would serve both Miller and the region as a whole well, and these principles are ones that helped shape our 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan."

"Again, thank you for your comments and for contributing to the process. I hope that the information above proves helpful. Finally, thank you for your organization's willingness to help us, as it is the participation of organizations such as yours that help us do our work better."

END