

Public Comment Report

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

March 24, 2014

The Indiana Department of Transportation proposed amendments to add the expansion of I-65 from US 231 south to SR 2, and United Bridge Partners proposed amendments to add their Cline Avenue bridge project to the following documents:

- 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (2040 CRP)
- 2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- Air Quality Conformity Analysis, a new version which includes the proposed projects

Additionally, the Town of Porter is proposing to amend the existing State Road 49 project in the 2040 CRP and Air Quality Conformity Analysis from a three lane configuration to the existing four lane configuration.

Together, these items constitute Amendment #4 to the 2040 CRP and Amendment #11 to the 2014-2017 TIP.

These items were subject to a formal 30-day public comment period which commenced on February 3, 2014 and ended on March 21, 2014. During the public comment period, NIRPC hosted two public meetings to gather comments. The meeting schedule was:

- February 18, 2014: Merrillville Town Hall, 7820 Broadway, 1:00 to 3:00 pm
- February 19, 2014: East Chicago Public Library Main Branch, 2401 E. Columbus Drive, 2:00 to 4:00 pm

The comments received at these meetings have been compiled into the following report, along with comments received on NIRPC's telephone comment line at (219) 763-6060, ext. 160, via email, and via the United States Postal Service. This report is also being provided to the Indiana Department of Transportation, United Bridge Partners, and the Town of Porter as the projects sponsors. During the formal public comment period, NIRPC received nine (9) comments through the aforementioned means.

On February 18, 2014 a public meeting was held at Merrillville Town Hall in Merrillville, Indiana. Graphics were provided, a brief presentation was given, and staff was available to gather questions and comments. There were 22 attendees who provided the following comments:

Comment: What is the length of the I-65 project?

NIRPC Response: *The project involves seven (7) miles of I-65 in each direction, for a total of about 14 lane miles. Thank you for your comment.*

On February 19, 2014 a public meeting was held at the main branch of the East Chicago Public Library in East Chicago, Indiana. Graphics were provided, a brief presentation was given, and staff was available to gather questions and comments. There were nine (9) attendees who provided the following comments:

Comment: East Chicago Transit used to have a bus route that ran on the old Cline Avenue bridge. Will there be a bus route on the new bridge?

NIRPC Response: *That is a decision that will have to be made by East Chicago Transit. Thank you for your comment.*

Comment: Commuters to the mills and casinos from the west and northwest would have to pay a toll in order to take the shortest route, but commuters from the south and east would not.

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC appreciates your input and thanks you for your involvement in this process.*

Comment: I hope that the City of East Chicago would use the money saved from not having to fund, operate, and maintain the bridge to improve the transit system, especially the Griffith Plaza route to make sure that connectivity to the Woodmar Walmart is maintained once that Walmart is expected to move to near the Cabela's south of the Borman.

NIRPC Response: *The Indiana Department of Transportation was responsible for the operation and maintenance of the original bridge as it was a state highway. The new bridge will be privately owned, funded, and operated. Thank you for your comment.*

The following comments were received via email at comments@nirpc.org.

Comment: It is absurd that the Cline Ave. bridge will be a private toll bridge. Your organization should be screaming bloody murder and demanding that our tax money be returned to make this new bridge, which takes workers to a revenue (both tax and income generating) producing area, a toll free road. This is just more insult to injury for Lake County. Determining whether a bridge should be toll or toll free is part of planning. I'm not interested in hearing that the state is not capable of running a road or bridge. Hire people with the skills to do it. Tax payers will come out ahead because there will be no profit siphoned off by the cronies of our legislature.

Thomas C. Serynek

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC appreciates your input and thanks you for your involvement in this process.*

Comment: The widening of Interstate 65 with additional travel lanes from US 231 to SR 2 is a much needed project. As one who travels that route often, I have seen the need for more capacity. I 65 should be expanded to 6 lanes from US 231 to the Lebanon six lanes and from the Greenwood interchange to the Sellersburg interchange in southern Indiana.

Jody Melton

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC appreciates your input and thanks you for your involvement in this process.*

Comment: I used to take the Cline Avenue extension every day to and from work. I miss it A LOT. Its absence adds a lot of time to my commute. But if you put a TOLL bridge in its place, I will not be paying to use it. That's ridiculous.

Teena Dugan

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC appreciates your input and thanks you for your involvement in this process.*

Comment: I think this is a sham, this avenue was built and paid for with our tax dollars and shouldn't be a tollway. The state is pushing for a new non toll road to Illinois and they won't replace an existing one!? I won't use it!

NIRPC Response: *NIRPC appreciates your input and thanks you for your involvement in this process.*

Comment: Please do include the Cline Avenue bridge in your plans for the coming year. I have a hard time believing that this is still a question about whether or not to include it.

The bridge is essential for those of us in East Chicago to get into Chicago efficiently. The bridge's absence is a terrible void for us.

But I want to express concern about the toll that will be attached to the bridge. Given that Cline Avenue is our shortest route into Chicago and that the connection happens by connecting with the Skyway, tolls are already exorbitant to get into Chicago, If the new bridge toll were 50 cents or less, it could be reasonable and workable. If it is a dollar or more each way, we are looking at the shortest route to Chicago, which some of us make very often, to cost \$10-\$12 round trip. That is not workable for most of us, and is unreasonable. If the bridge must be a toll bridge, please make the tolls reasonable and workable for us.

I seriously ask why we northern Indiana people who have funded and continue to fund the Indiana Toll Road are not able to tap Major Moves or other state money to replace this vital bridge for us. If the bridge were in Indianapolis, it would have been re-built immediately, not 4-5 years later and then with a toll.

Joyce Diltz

NIRPC Response: *Any decisions regarding the funding for rebuilding state highways is made by the Indiana Department of Transportation. The decision to not use Major Moves funding was made at the state level. Thank you for your comment.*