

NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Public Participation Plan 2013

Initial Draft
2/12/2013

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2013 NIRPC Board of Commissioners

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 Lake County Surveyor George Van Til
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 Mayor of East Chicago Anthony Copeland, Executive Board
 Mayor of Gary Karen Freeman-Wilson
 Mayor of Hammond Thomas M. McDermott, Jr.
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 Pottawattomie Park Town Council Vacant
 Trail Creek Town Council John Bayler
 Wanatah Town Council Diane Noll
 Westville Town Council Vacant
 Governor of Indiana Chester Dobbis, Executive Board

2013 Public Participation Task Force Members

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Mary Jane Thomas, Director of Community Development & Planning, City of LaPorte

Chapter One: Introduction

Nestled in the Northwest corner of Indiana between the metropolitan influences of Chicago and Indianapolis, and shaped by sand and steel, Northwest Indiana draws on a rich history of economic accomplishment and unmatched natural beauty. Today, these advantages present us with a unique challenge in an unpredictable world – to shape our own future and to sustain our diverse quality of life.

Originally called the Lake - Porter Counties Regional Transportation and Planning Commission, NIRPC was created by state statute in 1966 and defined as a multi-purpose, area-wide planning agency. In 1975, Governor Otis T. Bowen of Indiana designated NIRPC as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the two-county region. In 1979, by an amendment to the original state statute, the name was changed to NIRPC, and The Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary was extended to include LaPorte County.

The agency conducts the continuous, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning process required of all MPOs. Planning is carried out in accordance with the federal transportation planning requirements of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA – LU), and its successor legislation Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and their predecessor acts. The United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) reviews NIRPC’s metropolitan area transportation planning process every four years.

In 2003, major changes were made to NIRPC’s functions and appointing authorities in a law passed by the Indiana General Assembly and signed by the Governor. The new legislation defined NIRPC as a council of governments (COG) and designated regional planning responsibilities in the areas of economic development, environmental resources, and transportation. Reorganizing as a council of governments increased the size of the Commissioner Board from 39 to 51. The new seats included representation from all 41 cities and towns in the three-county region. The legislation also specified that only elected officials could be appointed to serve on the Commission. The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) and public transit operators continue to participate on the Commission as non-voting members.

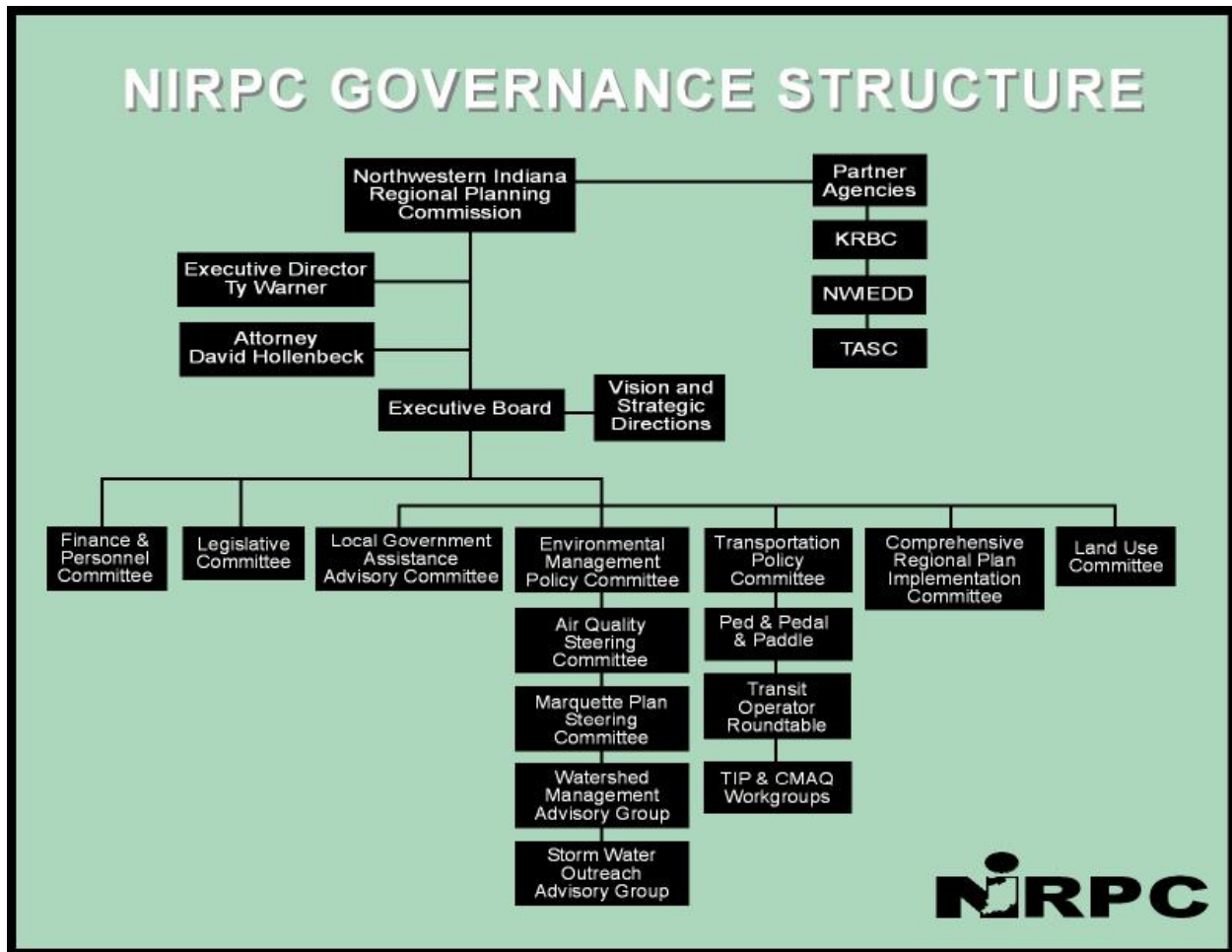


Figure A: NIRPC Organizational Chart

The business of the agency is conducted through the Commission's policy advisory committees in each of the three planning domains, plus a Finance and Personnel Policy Committee. Many of the agency's planning activities are conducted through task forces or working groups which report to the appropriate policy advisory committee. Participation on these task forces and working groups is open to the public. Information on current planning initiatives and opportunities for participation is located on the NIRPC web site at <http://www.nirpc.org>.

To address its many planning responsibilities, NIRPC develops a wide variety of plans. Recent examples include the:

- 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (2040 CRP);
- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP);
- Watershed Management Plan;
- Public Participation Plan (PPP) 2013;
- Ped and Pedal Plan 2010; and
- Regional Intelligent Transportation Systems Architecture.

NIRPC welcomes and encourages public participation in the planning activities of the agency. The Public Participation Plan presents NIRPC's goals and objectives for engaging the public as active participants in the agency's planning activities. It describes the various methods staff can use to solicit, involve, and respond to the region's residents during transportation and other planning processes. The plan provides NIRPC staff with a set of tools they will use, as appropriate, for working through these public participation processes and engaging people in a variety of ways.

While NIRPC faces challenges in dealing with declining federal, state and local funding, the agency will use whatever resources are available to ensure the participation of all residents of northwest Indiana. While every technique may not be used every time to involve and collaborate with the public, a combination of techniques mentioned in Chapter Six: Public Involvement Techniques will be employed by NIRPC staff to maximize outreach.

Through discussions and public meetings, NIRPC aims to reach the residents of Northwest Indiana through as many venues as possible. From the web to social media, as well as mass regular and electronic mailings and NIRPC's newsletter, *the regional view*, NIRPC will continue to inform and engage the public with traditional and non-traditional techniques. NIRPC's mission is to involve the public in its decisions that affects the future of Northwest Indiana, and to consider the public as stakeholders in the decisions that help strengthen the region.

Chapter Two: MPO Public Participation Requirements

As the designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for Northwest Indiana, NIRPC is responsible for carrying out the transportation planning public participation regulations contained in 23 CFR 450.316 and published on February 14, 2007. The federal regulations call for a participatory process “for providing residents, affected public agencies, representatives of public transportation employees, freight shippers, providers of freight transportation services, private providers of transportation, representatives of users of public transit, representatives of users of pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities, representatives of the disabled, and other interested parties with reasonable opportunities to be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process.” (23 CFR 450.316(a))

When a major planning process is undertaken, NIRPC will form a task force or a steering committee to convene and formulate the plan. In the case of an updated Public Participation Plan, the drafted plan has a minimum forty-five day public comment period. If significant public comment is made, suggesting revision of the plan, the edits will be made and the plan will be posted to the public for an additional forty-five days. If the plan receives no major suggestions for revision, the plan is proposed to the NIRPC Board of Commissioners for adoption. How NIRPC implements the transportation planning process is below.

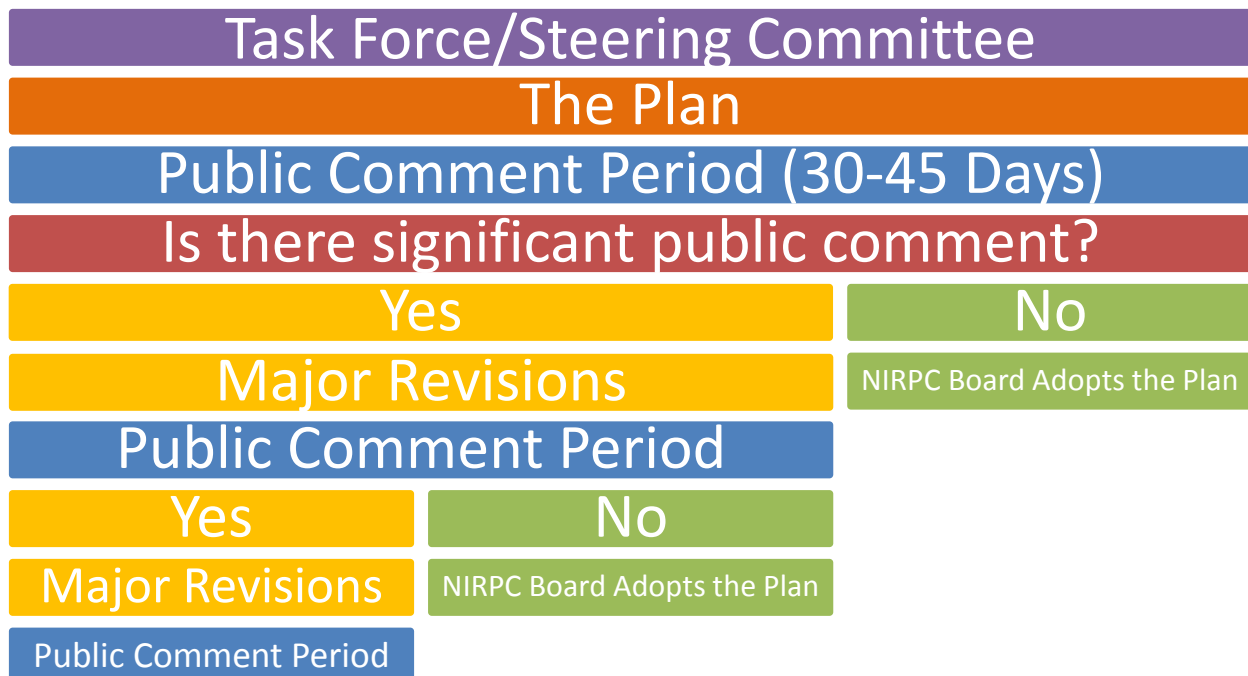


Figure B: NIRPC Transportation Process Chart.

Specifics on the length of required public review and comment periods required for the transportation planning documents are contained in the chart below. These standards are set by the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, although the length of the comment period can be extended at the discretion the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

MPO MINIMUM DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Required Review Period</u>
<i>Federally Required Documents</i>	
Long Range Transportation Plan	30 Days
Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	30 Days
Air Quality Conformity Determination	30 Days
Unified Planning Work Program	30 Days
Public Participation Plan (PPP)	45 Days
Major Amendments to Long Range Plan, TIP and Air Quality Conformity Determination	30 Days
Major Amendments to PPP	45 Days
<i>Other Regionally Significant Plans</i>	
Transportation Support Documents (Ped and Pedal Plan, Sensible Tools Handbook, etc.)	30 Days
Regional Environmental Plans (i.e. Watershed Management Plan)	30 Days
Regional Economic Development Plans	30 Days

Figure C: MPO Document Requirements

Comments received during the formal comment period are reviewed by staff and the applicable task force/steering committee. Comments are defined as significant comments if they result in the following actions being taken:

1. Require substantive changes and additions to the draft document;
2. Propose major MPO policy revisions and additions; and/or
3. Contain major new projects not previously subjected to public review and comment.

After working with a task force or steering committee, the staff prepares a recommendation on whether to change the draft document. If the task force decides a significant change should be made, the document is amended and the revised draft is submitted for an additional thirty-day public review and comment

period (except for the Public Participation Plan, which requires an additional forty-five day comment period.)

Involving Persons with Disabilities

One of the first tasks in improving the participation of persons with disabilities is to improve the accessibility to NIRPC meetings, task forces and working groups. Due to the lack of public transportation to get across county lines in general, and across most municipal lines in particular, access to the NRIPC office is limited for persons from two of the three member counties. NIRPC is committed to opening up the opportunities to participate by implementing several new initiatives.

Web-Casting Meetings – Once NIRPC has the necessary bandwidth to be technologically capable of web-casting many of its meetings, it will do so. The goal for having this capability is by the beginning of 2014. All meetings of the MPO transportation policy committee and transportation work groups and task forces will be available live on the web. People participating via the web cast will be able to request accessible format documents in advance and submit comments in real time. The full commission meetings held quarterly will eventually also be web-cast.

Variable Meeting Locations – In addition to being web-cast, NIRPC will periodically rotate meeting locations among the three member counties for meetings of the Transportation Policy Committee when significant transit planning decisions are on the agenda. Significant decisions include changes to the transit component of the long-range plan, a new or substantially revised TIP, or adoption of a new or updated targeted transit plan, such as the Coordinated Human Services Plan. Furthermore, NIRPC will consider rotating locations for its quarterly full commission meetings to further improve accessibility to more residents and transportation stakeholders.

Special Participants in the MPO Planning Process

The MPO planning regulations call for direct participation of the local public transit operators, paratransit providers, and other agencies and officials responsible for other planning activities within the planning area that are affected by transportation in the development of long-range plans and the TIP. For public and paratransit operators this requirement is met through the Transit Operators Roundtable, a group that NIRPC convenes. It provides transit operators with direct access to the planning and programming processes and as a source for information on new or revised MPO policies or procedures.

To strengthen the ties between the MPO and transit operators, NIRPC membership was altered to provide for a representative selected by the transit operators to sit on the NIRPC Board. Public, private and paratransit providers are also routinely included as stakeholders in transportation planning task forces and steering committees. Representatives of “other related agencies and officials,” including human services, municipal and county planners and highway officials, private and public sector economic development officials, environmental interests, airport operations, and freight interests are members of the MPO transportation policy committee.

Representatives of other related agencies and officials, along with INDOT, the transit operators, and representatives of the disability community, the elderly, low-income and transit users, constitute the core group of stakeholders in the transportation planning process. This core group is the main source of volunteers for working groups, steering committees and task forces formed as needed to support a specific planning activity, such as the long-range plan.

The last category of special participants is Federal Land recipients. In Northwest Indiana, this includes the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. The National Park Service maintains a consistent presence in the transportation planning process by having representation on the MPO policy advisory committee and serving on related task forces and working groups. There are no Indian Tribal lands or National Forests in Northwest Indiana.

Coordination with Statewide Transportation Planning

In addition to fostering participation with the public and a broad range of stakeholders, the MPO planning regulations also call for MPO’s coordination with the statewide transportation planning public participation and consultation processes.

Coordination with the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) takes place in two ways:

1. INDOT representatives participate monthly in the NIRPC Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) meetings. INDOT, as well as the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and The Chicago Metro Area Planning (CMAP) are

- as members of the TPC. These members, in addition to other stakeholders, serve as an on-going opportunity for bi-state, federal, state and local officials to coordinate and cooperate.
2. For public review and comment on state transportation plans, NIRPC works cooperatively with INDOT in publicizing their public planning meetings. Prior to these meetings, INDOT district staff meets with MPO staff to review projects proposed in Northwest Indiana. Issues are resolved informally if possible. If not, the MPO submits formal written comments when the annual meeting takes place. The INDOT process provides for responses to comments within thirty days.

Chapter Three: Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Revisions Amendments and Administrative Modifications

Introduction

A Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a short-term (four-year) list of federally funded surface transportation investment projects in a metropolitan planning area. Surface transportation projects include those for public transit, local and state highways and bicycle/pedestrian projects. (NIRPC's metropolitan planning area consists of the entire three-county area—Lake, LaPorte, and Porter Counties.)

A TIP must also include all regionally significant surface transportation projects, including those funded without federal funds. All local preservation and maintenance projects listed in a TIP must be consistent with the current regional transportation plan, which currently is the 2040 CRP. All capacity-increasing projects (such as added travel lane projects or regionally significant new roadways) must be specifically identified in both the regional transportation plan and its accompanying Air Quality Conformity Determination.

Local preservation and maintenance projects included in the TIP are prioritized and selected in accordance with guidance from the regional transportation plan. Both the plan and TIP must conform to the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality.

NIRPC's Board adopts a new TIP every other year. In between, revisions are made to the TIP by way of amendments. The purpose of this section of the Public Participation Plan is to identify the various types of TIP revisions that are typically encountered and describe the process through which these changes will be made to the TIP. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Planning Regulations that govern the development of Transportation Improvement Programs (23 CFR Part 450) require that these amendment processes and procedures be included in this Public Participation Plan.

Terms and Definitions

TIP Amendment. A TIP amendment is a change to the TIP that is subjected to a public comment period, reviewed by the Transportation Policy Committee, and formally adopted by the NIRPC Board.

Administrative Modification. An administrative modification modifies a project already in the TIP. Changes made in this manner are not subjected to a public comment period, not reviewed by the Transportation Policy Committee, and not formally adopted by the NIRPC Board.

Project Phases. Each highway construction project typically has three phases, Preliminary Engineering (PE), Right of Way (RW), and Construction (CN). Additionally, some project sponsors may break a lengthy roadway improvement project into multiple segments, also referred to as phases.

Conformity Determination. Regulations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that implement the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require that a formal, ongoing process be established to ensure that the Regional Transportation Plan and TIP conform to the State Implementation Plan for Air Quality. Each transportation Plan (or amendment thereto) and each new TIP must be supported by an updated Conformity Determination. The Conformity Determination will identify all Regionally Significant, Non-Exempt projects that add capacity-to the transportation network. Capacity-increasing projects that are not in the Conformity Determination may not be included in a TIP.

Interagency Consultation Group. The Indiana Interagency Consultation Group (ICG) consists of representatives from EPA, Federal Highway Administration, (FHWA), Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). The ICG must review each TIP amendment prior to adoption to verify the air quality status of each project included in the amendment. The amendment may not take effect without this clearance.

TIP Amendments

There are three types of amendments: Minor Standard Amendments, Major Standard Amendments, and Emergency Amendments. Each are described as follows:

Minor Standard Amendments. Minor amendments add new or delete existing air quality-exempt projects, add federal funds to air quality-exempt projects already in the TIP that are funded entirely with non-federal funds, make changes in project termini (increases in length up to one-half mile) for air quality-exempt projects, minor changes in design concept or scope (with no additional travel lanes) for air quality-exempt projects).

Minor standard amendments require ICG review, a public review and comment period of one calendar week (or five business days) prior to final action by the NIRPC Board, and re-determination of fiscal constraint.

Major Standard Amendments. Major amendments make changes in project termini (increases in length of over one-half mile) for air quality-exempt projects, major changes in design concept or scope (with no additional travel lanes) for air quality-exempt projects), or involve the addition of a new phase to any air quality non-exempt project already in the Conformity Determination and TIP.

Major standard amendments require ICG review (and a conformity consultation call when the amendment involves a non-exempt project), a public review and comment period of 30 calendar days prior to final action by the NIRPC Board, and re-determination of fiscal constraint.

Amendments that add new air quality non-exempt projects to the TIP will be processed only when the project is listed in the then-current Conformity Determination.

Emergency Administrative Amendments. In rare instances NIRPC's Executive Director may make a TIP amendment via a letter to INDOT. These amendments will only be made after the Executive Director, upon the recommendation of the NIRPC Transportation Projects Manager (and others, if necessary), concludes that a delay in adding the project to the TIP through the standard amendment process would either: 1) adversely affect public well-being or safety, or 2) result in the lapse or loss of federal funds to the region. The Executive Director has the discretion to make or not make the amendment.

This process may not be used to make changes either to air quality non-exempt projects or to "regionally significant"¹ transportation projects. Emergency amendments will be submitted to the ICG for review on the date they are issued. The NIRPC Transportation Projects Manager must re-determine fiscal constraint prior to referring the amendment to the Executive Director.

Administrative Modifications

Changes to air quality exempt, non-Regionally Significant projects already in the TIP may be made by way of an administrative modification. The correction of

¹ See Appendix on page 46.

typographical and other errors will be made in this manner, along with changes in the year, federal funding type, level of funding (total or federal) and/or descriptive information. Division of one listed project into two (or more) or consolidation of multiple projects into a single project may also be performed administratively. Once these changes are made, NIRPC will inform INDOT and the project sponsor via e-mail.

Administrative modifications that involve increases in federal funds require a re-determination of fiscal constraint for the affected federal fund type.

Other Provisions

Publication of Current List of Projects. NIRPC will post a copy of the most current list of projects (as amended) on its website, along with each individual amendment following its adoption. Administrative modifications will be highlighted on the current list of projects in the TIP that is posted on NIRPC's website. Each batch of administrative modifications processed will be posted on NIRPC's website.

Interagency Consultation Group Review. All TIP amendments will be submitted to the Indiana Interagency Consultation Group (ICG) for review at least seven calendar days prior to NIRPC Board action. The ICG will determine the status of each item in the amendment pursuant to the Federal Clean Air Act and its implementing regulations. Projects may be removed from the amendment pursuant to ICG guidance.

NIRPC will also use the Public Participation Plan (PPP) as a way to increase public and stakeholder awareness about the federal and state dollars that NIRPC allocates to transportation projects.

Chapter Four: Purpose, Mission, Goals and Objectives

A Commitment to Environmental Justice

On Feb. 11, 1994, President Bill Clinton issued an Executive Order on Federal Actions to address environmental justice (EJ) in minority populations and low-income populations. It directed every federal agency to make environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on “minority populations and low income populations.” The order was designed to focus Federal attention on the environmental and human health conditions in minority communities and low-income communities with the goal of achieving environmental justice. The order promotes nondiscrimination in Federal programs substantially affecting human health and the environment, and provides minority and low-income communities’ access to public information on, and an opportunity for public participation in, matters relating to human health or the environment.

Northwest Indiana will focus on revitalization of the region’s “urban core” communities, which include Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City, to make efficient use of resources and to capitalize on existing infrastructure and assets. The application of environmental justice in these communities also demonstrates NIRPC’s commitment to shared benefits and burdens in the decision making process of NIRPC’s work. NIRPC also understand that the growth and revitalization of these communities are not only critical to these individual cities, but are essential to the continued success of Northwest Indiana as envisioned in the 2040 CRP.

Properly implemented, EJ principles and procedures improve all levels of transportation decision making. A comprehensive approach will:

- Result in better transportation decisions that meet the needs of all people.
- Design transportation facilities that respect context and integrate with existing communities.
- Enhance the public-involvement process, strengthen community-based partnerships, and provide minority populations and low-income populations with opportunities to learn about and improve the quality and usefulness of transportation in their lives.
- Improve data collection, monitoring, and analysis tools that assess the needs of, and analyze the potential impacts on, minority populations and low-income populations.

- Partner with other public and private programs to leverage transportation agency resources to achieve a common level of accessibility for communities.
- Avoid disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority populations and low-income populations.
- Minimize and/ or mitigate unavoidable impacts by identifying concerns early in the planning phase and providing offsetting initiatives and enhancement measures to benefit affected communities and neighborhoods.

As part of the 2040 CRP, NIRPC conducted an analysis of transportation projects in the plan, and measured the benefits and burdens that these projects would bring to environmental justice communities. While limited in scope, the outcome of the analysis showed that environmental justice communities either would benefit, or at very least not be burdened, by the transportation projects in the 2040 CRP.

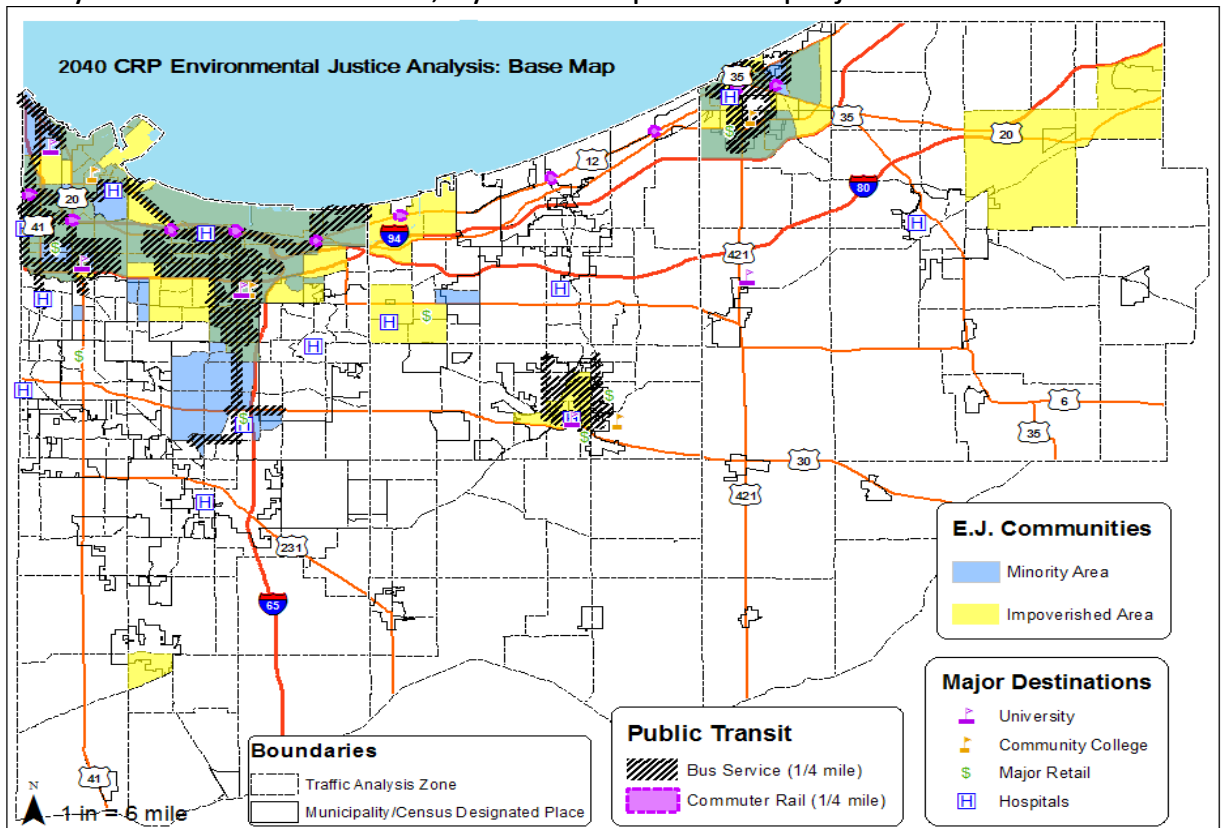


Figure D: 2040 CRP Environmental Justice Analysis. Source: NIRPC

The Environmental Justice Analysis is based on assumptions for population and employment that are grounded in the Growth and Revitalization Vision for Northwest Indiana – the preferred scenario for the CRP. The Vision calls for the revitalization of the urban core, the development of “livable centers” throughout the region, and in general an end to sprawling land use patterns. This analysis is

dependent on breaking with the status quo and implementing the recommendations of the CRP.

From May to August 2012, a Public Participation Task Force was convened and drafted the mission statement, purpose, and goals and objectives of the PPP, which NIRPC will incorporate into its programs. NIRPC will continue its commitment to broad-based citizen participation in all major regional planning activities. In addition, to ensure the continued relevance of the PPP, it will be reviewed and modified, as needed, every four years.

Public Participation Mission Statement

The NIRPC Public Participation mission is to engage residents of Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties in a meaningful exchange of ideas to move toward solutions for the diverse needs of the region's present and future transportation, economic and environmental planning and programming.

Purpose of the Public Participation Plan

The Plan outlines goals and objectives for public participation in the Commission's transportation, economic development and environmental plans and programs. It identifies public involvement activities that NIRPC will use to achieve the Plan's goals.

Public Participation Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: To develop strategic outreach plans which assure outreach to all of the public, with specific attention given to individuals and groups who have been traditionally underserved and underrepresented in the regional planning process.

Objective 1.1 Increase the participation of individuals in the regional planning process, with specific attention given to minorities, low-income persons, people with disabilities, the young, the elderly, and non-English speaking communities.

Objective 1.2 Build a communications network with organizations within the region.

Goal 2: To create a public involvement environment that is welcoming, open, accessible, easily understood, participatory, and inclusive.

Objective 2.1 Interact with the public in a manner that demonstrates active listening, mutual respect, understanding, acceptance, and responsiveness.

Objective 2.2 Build consensus and trust.

Objective 2.3 Communicate in alternative and/or bilingual formats as necessary to facilitate full participation of all residents.

Goal 3: To foster continuous dialogue with the public.

Objective 3.1 Develop relationships with the public using appropriate communications techniques.

Objective 3.2 Use tools such as the NIRPC website, social media, online surveys, and crowdsourcing applications to engage the public.

Goal 4: To assure decision makers are informed of public input.

Objective 4.1 Provide detailed and objective information that clearly defines the issue at hand

Objective 4.2 Provide timely information and opportunities for public dialogue in advance of key decision points

Objective 4.3 Provide feedback to the public on how their input was used by decision makers.

Goal 5: To continuously evaluate the public participation process.

Objective 5.1 Provide a means for residents' feedback on the public participation process.

Objective 5.2 Establish internal and external evaluation processes.

Objective 5.3 Evaluate actual performance in a timely manner and take corrective action as needed.

Objective 5.4 Communicate results of the evaluation process to participants and decision makers to demonstrate accountability

Chapter Five: Design of the Public Participation Process

NIRPC has determined that a more expansive and inclusive public engagement process similar to involvement in the 2040 CRP, should be established that better serves the public and other stakeholders in Northwest Indiana.² This chapter provides guidance to NIRPC staff on designing meetings and workshops to meet that need. NIRPC hosts or participates in many meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders, and this chapter is a guide to ensure that stakeholders are engaged at every step of the planning process, given the resources NIRPC has to reach out and involve people.

With this in mind, NIRPC staff will use a combination of techniques to reach the public and specific stakeholders. Actively engaging stakeholders in local and regional planning discussions is an opportunity for NIRPC to build on existing relationships and to develop new relationships with diverse stakeholder groups in the region. Community forums should be designed to encourage facilitated, small group discussions of issues at individual tables, while having large numbers of engaged and committed stakeholders discuss, deliberate and prioritize important issues. Consensus building by participants and prioritization of those issues, using, for example, individual keypads³ for voting, allow for room-wide buy-in for those issues.

When setting goals for projects, project designers should take the opportunity to:

- Share information with stakeholders;
- Allow stakeholders to discuss, build consensus, and prioritize action items for recommendations to the NIRPC Board;
- Establish a more engaging public process; and
- Design agenda items that will improve the outcomes of the projects or plans.

Working with Stakeholders and Leadership on a Common Process

NIRPC will work strategically with our Commissioners and Committee members to gain the best understanding of how stakeholders respond to civic engagement in Northwest Indiana. This will be executed through understanding the initiatives being developed for planning projects and designing an engagement plan to be

² “Stakeholder”

³ Keypads are electronic devices used to prioritize actions and recommendations. Keypads will not be used at every public meeting. See Keypad Polling in the Appendix on page 44 for more information.

executed in public forums. Using a common process to execute outreach across all communities and achieving the highest level of participation from stakeholders will help NIRPC involve its stakeholders, and analyze how the demographics of these various stakeholders change over time. This will lead to greater understanding between NIRPC, the public and stakeholders in achieving the goals of the public participation process.

Working with Stakeholders to Design an Engaging Process

The stakeholder's participation is impacted by the needs that have to be addressed in the communities they represent. Outreach to stakeholders will create a better environment of trust in a process that establishes a public participation goal of working directly with stakeholders in each aspect of decision-making, including the identification of shared solutions. NIRPC staff will work with stakeholders to design, develop, and execute an Outreach Plan to reach demographic targets for each meeting, to ensure that the right participants are in the room.

NIRPC understands that not every stakeholder or member of the public will be able to attend every meeting. Realizing this, we assume that people still want to be informed about the work we do. NIRPC will therefore use a combination of techniques to record all public meetings, and to inform as many stakeholders as possible of their outcomes.⁴

Room Design

NIRPC staff will collaborate with stakeholders to design and conduct engaging and participatory meetings. Meetings will be designed around exercises and discussions to foster the highest engagement at each table for all attendees. The discussions will generate consensus around critical issues and will be prioritized for action-oriented outcomes.

Meetings will be designed to have (*Working assumption, 50 participants*):

- **Participants** at tables of 5-10 people (large room and small discussion)
- A **Lead Facilitator** to conduct the meeting from the front of the room
- Tables that accommodate small discussion with a **Table Facilitator**

⁴ See Chapter 5 for information on techniques NIRPC uses to share information with the public.

- Tables with technology for engagement, **keypads for each participant** to prioritize issues
- Agenda Framework⁵

Meeting Design

Public meetings should be designed to involve a diverse group of stakeholders, regardless of the meeting's topic. Tables should be set up to encourage small group discussion, with each table including a diverse mix of people representing various professions,⁶ races, ages, and ethnicities. While round tables are preferred because they make everyone feel that they have equal standing, square tables can be used if round tables are not available. Figure H below shows an ideal setup for a public meeting.

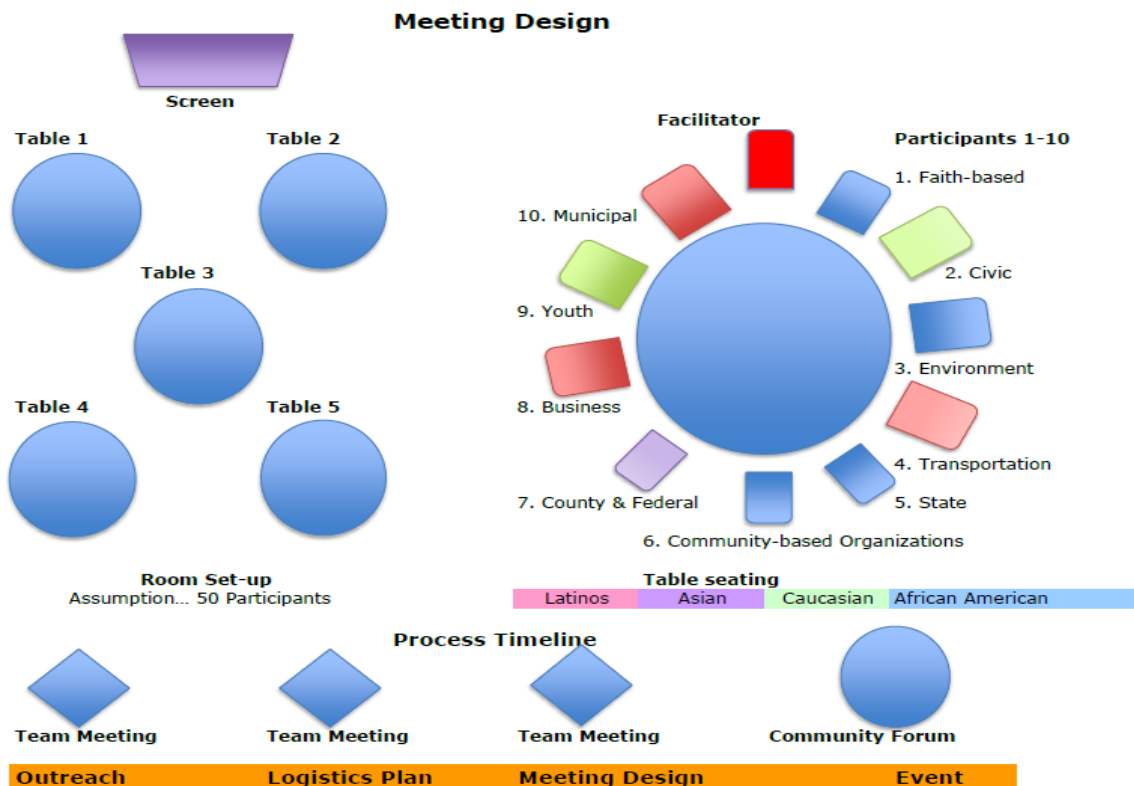


Figure E: Meeting Design Source: Hubert Morgan

All public meetings need an agenda. Every agenda should include, at a minimum: goals for the meeting, a discussion of values, identification of issues, and a discussion of responsibility and accountability. Taken together, these items will create both a sense of ownership of the meeting's outcomes, and a sense of individual and organizational responsibility, in each of the participants.

⁵ See appendix.

⁶ As a rule, people representing the same organization should be placed at separate tables.

A brief “reporting out” session near the end of the meeting allows NIRPC staff to reaffirm what was discussed and what was agreed upon during the course of the meeting. This further reinforces the communication between stakeholders and our agency, and lets participants take pride in their ideas and empowers them as residents who can make a difference in their communities.

Chapter Six: Public Involvement Techniques

This section contains a menu of public involvement techniques used by NIRPC. Included in this menu are descriptions and activities associated with each technique. Depending on the purpose of our outreach efforts, NIRPC will use the most appropriate and effective techniques to engage the public. The tools are grouped into categories based on increasing levels of public control over NIRPC’s planning outcomes.

	Control			
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information and to assist in their understanding of planning problems, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions.	To obtain public feedback on our planning work, analyses, outreach efforts, and decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the planning process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in every aspect of our planning process, including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions.
NIRPC’s Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influences our decisions.	We will work with you to ensure that your goals and aspirations are directly reflected in our planning work, and to provide feedback on how public input influences our decisions.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions to our planning issues, and incorporate your advice and recommendations into our decisions as much as possible.
Public Involvement Techniques	Website, Facebook, Twitter, Newsletters, Press Releases, Legal Advertisements, Direct Mailings, Fact Sheets, Display Advertisements	Facebook, Twitter, Surveys, Comment Forms, Public Meetings	Open Houses, Group Meetings, Webinars, Surveys	Task Forces, Working Groups, Friends of NIRPC, Youth Outreach, Small Group Meetings

Figure F: Public Participation Matrix

Source: NIRPC, adapted from International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum

Techniques to Inform the Public

Goal: To provide the public with balanced and objective information, and to assist in their understanding of planning problems, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions.

NIRPC Website

Description: The website contains information about NIRPC's major planning activities. Agency work products, such as the 2040 CRP, the Ped, Pedal & Paddle Plan, the agency's Unified Planning Work Program, and extensive demographics data will be available here. Links to local, state and federal sites are provided. A two-month calendar of public meetings and events is easily accessible and up-to-date.

Outcomes: The website is used by the public as an informational and educational tool.

Newsletters

Description: Newsletters are produced on an on-going basis and for special projects and planning activities. The agency newsletter, *The Regional View*, is circulated electronically and in print on a quarterly basis. Project specific newsletters, such as the Watershed Management Plan newsletter, are produced on an as needed basis.

Outcomes: Newsletters inform and educate the public about NIRPC and major planning projects.

Press Releases

Description: Formal press releases are distributed to local media including newspapers, radio stations, local cable and public TV. They will announce upcoming special events and to provide information on specific issues that are introduced to the Commission.

Outcomes: Announcements are made to inform the public of special events, such as federal planning certification reviews, major plan adoptions, and opportunities for public engagement.

Legal Advertisements

Description: Legal notices announce pending major actions and public hearings. They advertise requests for proposals, requests for qualifications, and bids. Legal notices also announce opportunities for public review and comment.

Outcomes: Advertisements are made of proposed major plan actions, MPO formal hearings, and other special activities.

Direct Mailings

Description: Direct mailings are used routinely to announce upcoming meetings. Letters or flyers may also be used to announce special meetings, such as public meetings on long-range plans, or meetings on highway projects that will have a major impact on the region.

Outcomes: Announcements are made for meeting notices, notices of public comment opportunities, open houses, and other major activities that NIRPC or its stakeholders sponsor.

Display Ads, Announcements, and Flyers

Description: Display ads, announcements and flyers are used to promote meetings and activities that are not regularly scheduled, such as open houses. They are published in local newspapers and/or posted at meeting sites such as libraries and municipal offices.

Outcomes: Announcements and flyers are made to advertise and inform the public of project or plan-specific meetings, workshops, open houses and formal public hearings.

Fact Sheets and General Information Documents

Description: Fact sheets and general information documents are brief statements of facts or brief descriptions of, a program or project that provides information to the public. They are circulated both electronically and by mail.

Outcomes: Fact sheets and general information documents are made to provide information on current and forthcoming planning projects.

Comment Forms

Description: Comment forms provide a method for the public to express their opinions on plans or projects. They are made available at open houses, formal public hearings, and on the website, and may be included in newsletters.

Outcomes: Comment forms and comment cards are provided at public workshops, open houses, public hearings and other meetings. Comment cards are included in newsletters.

Techniques to Engage the Public as Consultant

Goal: To obtain public feedback on our planning work, analyses, outreach efforts, and decisions.

Facebook

Description: NIRPC posts upcoming events and links to other web sites and articles on its various Facebook pages. Facebook will serve as a source for discussion about topics that affect the region. NIRPC currently has several Facebook pages: the *Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission*, *INVolve Northwest Indiana*, *Splash* and the *Northwest Indiana Greenways and Blueways Plan*.

Outcomes: Share information about meetings and events at NIRPC and throughout the region in a manner beyond the traditional NIRPC communications listed in this chapter. Information is shared about meetings and events at NIRPC and at our “Friend” agencies in the region. Discussions of important regional issues are conducted on our Facebook pages. Comments and feedback on NIRPC’s programs and planning activities are sought and received via Facebook.

Twitter

Description: NIRPC currently does not use Twitter, but plans to in the future. NIRPC will use Twitter to share information about our events, meetings, plans,

and programs, but will also use Twitter to re-tweet information, events, and articles from other sources in the region.

Outcomes: NIRPC shares news and information about events, meetings, programs, and plans for NIRPC and other regional agencies. NIRPC solicits feedback from our stakeholders and the public on our programs and planning projects.

Surveys

Description: Paper and electronic surveys are used when very specific input from the public is needed. Surveys ask specific questions related to planning projects and initiatives. They can be conducted via the NIRPC website, Facebook or through Survey Monkey, and can be distributed at meetings, special activities, or through the mail.

Outcomes: Public comments are obtained for origin-destination studies, corridor studies, public transit route analyses, and other planning studies.

Techniques to Involve the Public

Goal: To work directly with the public throughout the planning process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Open Houses

Description: Open houses are informal public meetings, where project team members interact with the public on a one-on-one basis. Short presentations may be given at these meetings. The open houses are intended to provide information and to solicit public comment on a proposed plan or activity in the early stages of its development.

Outcomes: The public is invited to review plan development. The public is educated on planning issues.

Small Group Meetings

Description: These are targeted meetings held with a specific group of stakeholders, such as municipal and county planners, economic development specialists, youth groups, or neighborhood organizations.

Outcomes: Early plan development or preliminary study coordination.

Webinars

Description: Webinars are virtual meetings where participants join via telephone or online through chat windows. These meetings are low-cost, and require either telephone or internet service. Webinars allow for online sharing of content, and provide people with an opportunity to participate in meetings from home, work, or any location that is convenient for their needs.

Activities: Issues are discussed related to planning. Feedback is provided on plans and topics. Documents, photos, and web pages that articulate planning initiatives and projects are shared online.

Public Hearings

Description: Public hearings are legally advertised meetings in which a structured, formal procedure is used to take public comment. The proceedings are recorded and transcribed for the record.

Outcomes: Federally required hearings are conducted on certain public transit activities. Voluntary hearings are conducted when a formal record of public comment is desired.

Techniques to Collaborate with the Public

Goal: To partner with the public in every aspect of our planning process, including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions.

Youth Outreach and Inclusion

Description: These are special activities geared toward educating and involving young people in the regional planning process. This will include hosting events at K-12 schools throughout the region and collaborating with various organizations within Northwest Indiana. This also includes engagements at the six colleges and universities that are located in the region: Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana University Northwest, Purdue University Calumet; Valparaiso University; Calumet College of St. Joseph and Purdue University-North Central.

Outcomes: NIRPC staff will attend county fairs, speak at K-12 schools and universities, hold workshops for youth, provide interactive technology and promotional items to inform and engage youth.

Task Forces and Working Groups

Description: These special committees are created to address a particular subject or activity. They have a definite starting and ending point. Membership on a task force or working group is always open to the public.

Outcomes: Plans, small-area studies, and other planning studies are conducted.

“Friends of NIRPC”

Description: This new group will be composed of a variety of stakeholders from the public and private sector. Its purpose will be to serve as ambassadors of the organization, who will be responsible for informing people in their communities about NIRPC and its ongoing planning activities.

Activities: Hosting information sessions about NIRPC projects; facilitating the relationship between NIRPC and various stakeholders throughout Northwest Indiana; encourage civic engagement in NIRPC’s planning process; and serving as a resource for information about NIRPC and its current initiatives.

Other Techniques

Alternate Formats

Description: Alternate formats are used to accommodate residents who have difficulty in accessing news from NIRPC through traditional means. Examples include large print documents, compact discs (CDs), bilingual documents, or signers at public meetings or hearings.

Outcomes: Documents in alternate formats are made available upon request.

Chapter Seven: Evaluation of the Public Participation Process

The Meeting Report

The meeting report should be designed with outcomes in mind based on the results of the workshop. Within one month of the conclusion of a public meeting, a report should be posted on the website and sent to all of the people who were invited and attended the workshop, and interested Friends of NIRPC. This report should present the workshop goals, agenda and meeting design, as well as the following items:

- The outreach approach, Collaboration with Partners, and Presentations
- Engagement process
- Highlights of prioritized voting
- Analysis of demographic responses (“Who’s-in-the-room”) and participants’ priorities
- Final actions that should be taken to address the issues discussed at the meeting.

NIRPC strives to evaluate its public process internally and externally. Externally, participants in the workshops that NIRPC holds will be able to answer evaluation questions using Keypad Polling at the end of their event. This data will be used to gather feedback to analyze for use in future meetings. Participants can also fill out paper evaluations to give additional feedback to the staff person that organized the event after the meeting is over.

Internally, NIRPC will evaluate the methods they use to engage the public, from what techniques were used, what stakeholders were attended, and how will they be informed of the results after the meeting or workshop was concluded. The form for NIRPC staff members to fill out after an event is below.

Evaluation of the Public Involvement Process

Public Outreach Form for NIRPC staff

Plan or Project: _____

Evaluator(s): _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

Number of Participants: _____

Demographics

Race

Caucasian: _____ African-American: _____ Hispanic/Latino: _____

Asian/Island Pacific: _____ Native American: _____ Other: _____

Age

Younger than 25 years old: _____ 25-34: _____ 35-44: _____ 45-54: _____

55-64: _____ 65 years or older: _____

What types of stakeholders were represented at this meeting?

What type(s) of outreach activities/techniques were used?

How far in advance of key decision-making points did NIRPC seek public input and disseminate information? Was citizen feedback actively solicited throughout the project and/or planning period? If so, was it used in the evaluation?

How was public participation incorporated into the decision-making process?
Is there evidence of the degree to which public input influenced the process and changed the product?

How were residents informed of the results of the public participation process?

How did the incorporation of the PPP into the plan/project improve stakeholder input?

What techniques that were not used for this meeting should be used for future meetings?

Conclusion

NIRPC's Public Participation Plan represents the course of action that the organization is prepared to use in its future planning endeavors. We encourage you, the Northwest Indiana resident and stakeholder, to take an active role in positioning our region toward a vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united future. Whether you have been a consistent participant in regional forums or are new to the process, your input is valuable for our dialogue on successful implementation to continue.

Please take the time to read the full PPP, as well as other announcements and plans by NIRPC under the Transportation section on our web site at <http://www.nirpc.org/>. Here you will be able to digest the entire scope of the recommendations, list of best practices and detailed performance measures for each of the sections summarized in this document. You also will discover how you can play a vital role in creating our tomorrow... today.

Appendix

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Following is a list of terms and abbreviations commonly used in regional planning and MPO documents, including the Public Involvement Plan.

Comprehensive Planning

A planning process that addresses land use, transportation, utilities, education, recreation, health, housing, annexation, and economic development. It is also known as a master plan.

Contiguous Area

Land area immediately adjacent to and influenced by a defined planning area.

Coordination

The comparison of the transportation plans, programs, and schedules of one agency with related plans, programs and schedules of other agencies or entities and the adjustment of plans, programs and schedules to achieve general consistency.

Cooperation

The interaction of parties involved in carrying out the planning and/or project development process to achieve a common goal or objective.

Council of Governments

A cooperative association of local governments that addresses regional issues.

Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

FHWA

The Federal Highway Administration

FTA

The Federal Transit Administration

IDEM

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management

ICG

The Interagency Consultation Group (ICG) includes members of the staffs of the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Indiana Department of Transportation, Indiana Department of Environmental Management, and Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission. The group is responsible for coordination of activities related to air quality conformity, including the establishment of motor vehicle emissions budgets, regional emissions analyses and the determination of exemption status for transportation projects. All transportation projects must be cleared through this process before being included in the Transportation Improvement Program.

INDOT

The Indiana Department of Transportation

Keypad Polling

Wireless technology used in community meetings to prioritize actions and recommendations for decision making in the planning process. Keypads, which are about the size of a credit card, are used to select multiple choice answers based on the ideas and opinions of the participants. Keypad polling allows for voting to take place and display the results immediately.

MAP-21

The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act. This bill was signed in 2012, and will fund surface transportation programs at over \$105 billion for fiscal years (FY) 2013 and 2014. MAP-21 creates a streamlined and performance-based surface transportation program and builds on many of the highway, transit, bike, and pedestrian programs and policies established by the Federal Government.

Meaningful Dialogue

An exchange of ideas or opinions meant to help shape public policy or form consensus

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

The organization designated by the Governor to be responsible for developing

transportation plans and programs for urbanized areas of 50,000 or more. It is the forum for cooperative transportation decision making. NIRPC was designated the MPO for Lake and Porter Counties in 1975. LaPorte County joined NIRPC in 1979 and was added to the Metropolitan Area Boundary in 1994.

Metropolitan Area Boundary

At a minimum, the existing urban area, non-attainment area and contiguous area expected to become urban in the next 20 years. The metropolitan area boundary for northwest Indiana includes the entire Counties of Lake, Porter and LaPorte and defines the area within which NIRPC conducts the transportation planning process.

Non-attainment Area

Geographic areas designated by the USEPA for failure to meet the national ambient air quality standards defined in the Clean Air Act, as amended.

Paratransit

Public transit services available to the elderly and disability communities.

Public Hearing

A formal meeting at which the agency receives public comments or testimony on a particular proposed action. A transcript of the testimony received at a public hearing is prepared. Comments are responded to in writing after the meeting and are made part of the hearing's permanent record.

Public Participation

Actively engaging residents in regional public policy formation by allowing residents to discuss and provide suggestions on projects and initiatives of local and regional significance.

Public Meeting

An open forum in which all are welcome.

Regional Planning

Public sector activities encompassing economic, social, environmental and physical elements to develop and implement appropriate public policy in an area covering more than one jurisdiction.

Regionally Significant Project

A transportation project (other than an exempt project) that is on a facility, which serves regional transportation needs and would normally be included in the modeling of a metropolitan area's transportation network, including at a minimum all principle arterial highways and all fixed guide way transit facilities that offer an alternative to regional highway travel. Examples include roads that provide access to and from the area outside the region; major activity centers in the region; major planned developments such as new rental malls, sports complexes, etc.; or transportation terminals as well as most terminals themselves.

Social Equity

The overall fairness of a society in its divisions of rewards and burdens.

Stakeholder(s)

Individuals and organizations involved in or affected by the transportation planning process. Include federal/state/local officials, MPOs, transit operators, freight companies, shippers, and the public.

SAFETEA-LU

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – a Legacy for Users. A federal transportation bill that was passed in 2005. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. A Federal law providing that no person, irrespective of race, color, or national origin, shall be excluded from participating in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

A staged, multi-year multi-modal program of transportation projects in the MPO planning area that is consistent with the metropolitan transportation plan.

Transportation Plan (Long and short term)

A plan that identifies facilities that should function as an integrated metropolitan transportation system. It gives emphasis to those facilities that serve important national and regional transportation functions, and includes a financial plan that demonstrates how the plan can be implemented. A metropolitan area transportation plan must have at least a 20-year planning horizon.

Urbanized Area

A geographic area with a population of at least 50,000. The urbanized area of

Northwest Indiana as defined by the federal Census is approximately the northern half of Lake County, the northern third of Porter County, and a section of La Porte County, which includes the cities of Michigan City and La Porte.

USEPA

The United States Environmental Protection Agency

USDOT

The United States Department of Transportation

Public Participation and the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP)

The 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP) relied on an unprecedented level of public involvement to develop a vision that was representative of the entire region (see the following section for this regional vision). An Outreach Subcommittee advised the 2040 CRP Steering Committee to make sure that the process was inclusive. In the end, NIRPC engaged more than 2,300 residents to gather input, build consensus around goals and objectives for the 2040 CRP, and ensure that the recommendations of the plan are realistic and can be implemented.

Vision and Values Statement for the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan

INVision Northwest Indiana - Stretching from the treasured shores of Lake Michigan to the historic banks of the Kankakee River and committed to an ethic of sustainability:

A revitalized region

Urban areas are renewed, and our environment is clean.

A vibrant region

Our economy is thriving; our people are well educated; our growth is planned; and natural and rural areas are valued and protected.

An accessible region

Our people are connected to each other and to equal opportunities for working, playing, living and learning.

A united region

Celebrating our diversity, we work together as a community across racial, ethnic, political and cultural lines for the good of the region.

Drawing on the INVision Northwest Indiana themes of an accessible and united region, NIRPC will make participation in the planning process more accessible to all of our region’s residents. To read the entire Comprehensive Regional Plan, as well as the Executive Summary and other plans that NIRPC has created, please visit NIRPC’s web site at www.nirpc.org.

International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum

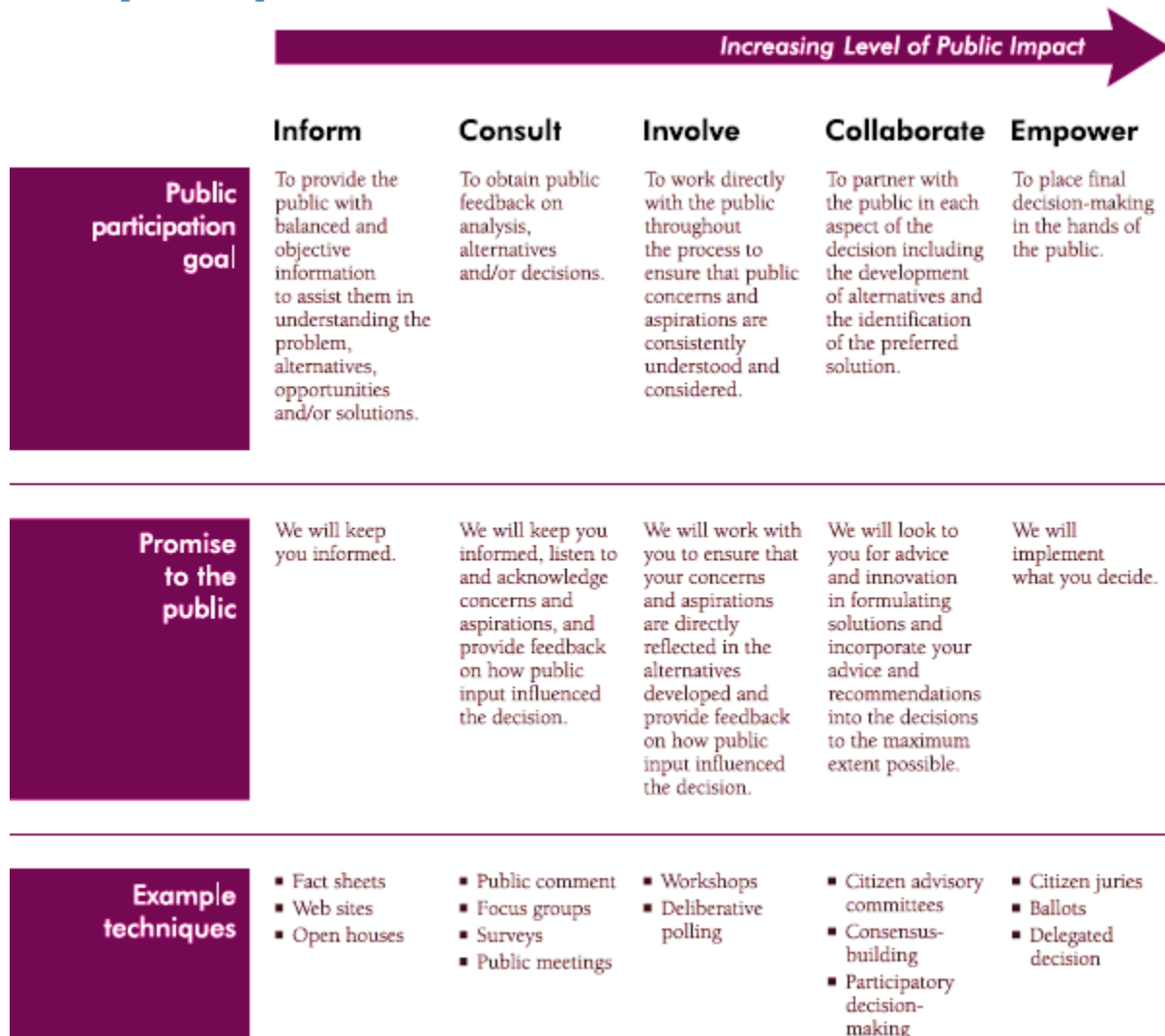


Figure G: International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum. Source: IAP2

*Waiting for copyright permission from IAP2.

Levels of Participation

These steps will help inform the NIRPC staff that designs the workshop. This type of information will help NIRPC staff tailor the presentation to the audience that it is presenting information to as well as facilitate better discussions for the participants. Figure G shows the levels of commitment NIRPC strives for the public and its stakeholders to have in NIRPC's projects and initiatives.

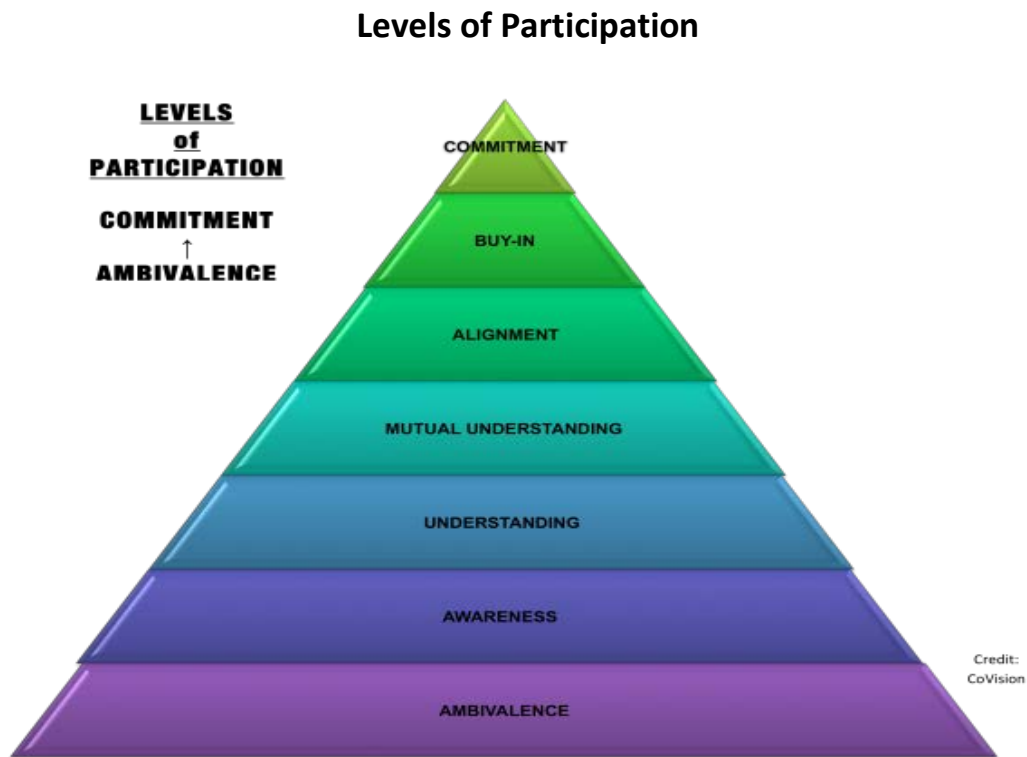


Figure H: Levels of Participation. Source: CoVision

NIRPC's goal in its outreach strategy is to lift stakeholders and the general public from the level of ambivalence or apathy to a level of personal commitment for NIRPC's projects and initiatives (see Figure J). While NIRPC understands that this is a multiple step process, NIRPC should not only promote awareness, but should make sure that the levels in which the public and stakeholder engage in projects at NIRPC continues to promote understanding and alignment with NIRPC's 2040 CRP vision.⁷ Over time, stakeholders and the public should reach the higher levels of participation towards shared commitment. As we strive for understanding, alignment, buy-in and ultimately commitment, NIRPC will maintain the

⁷ See page 9 for the 2040 CRP Vision and Values Statement

se relationships and its commitment to assisting stakeholders and the public in promoting their understanding about planning and its impact on Northwest Indiana.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

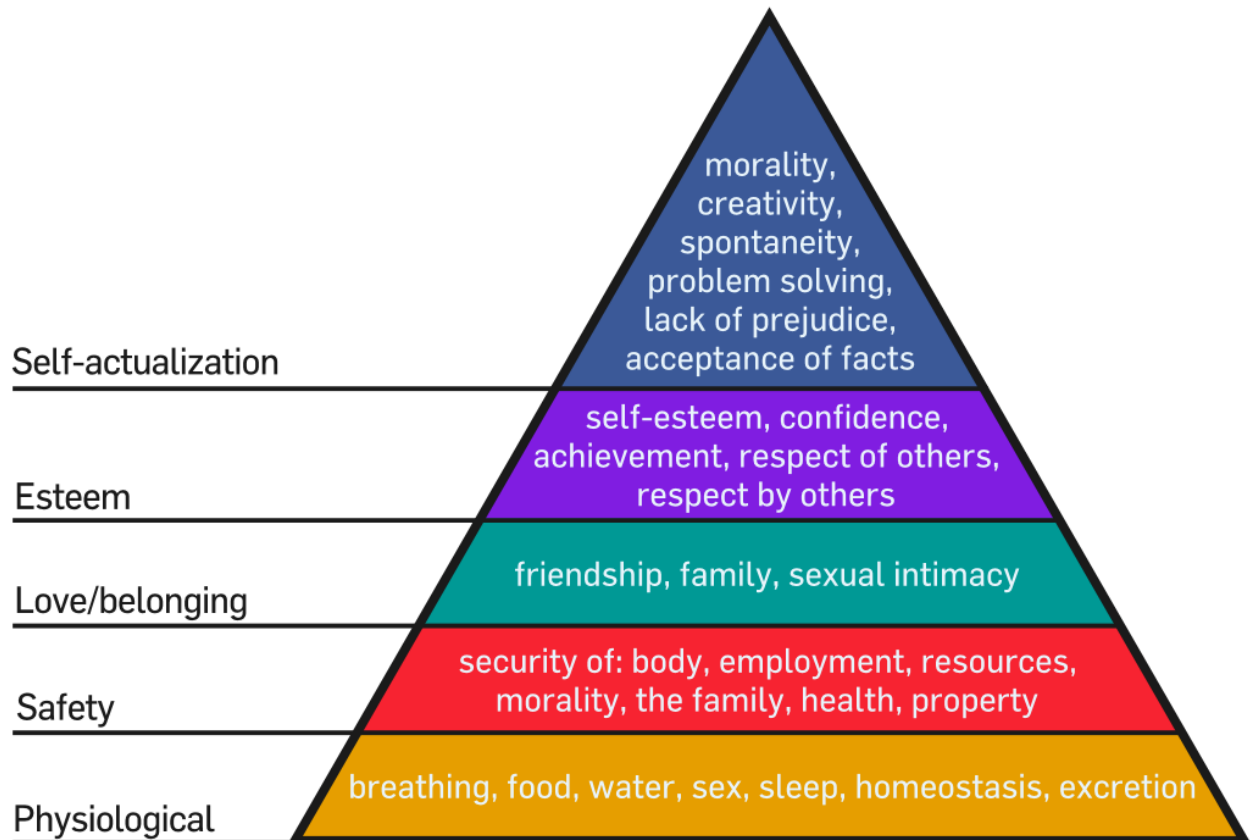


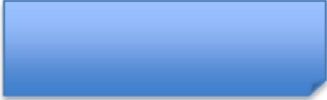






Figure 1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Source: Wikipedia Commons

Above, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows the needs that every human being has to address. NIRPC staff considers these needs when meetings are planned, and understands that not every person can attend every NIRPC engagement based on their priority of their personal needs.

Agenda Framework

Time	Agenda Framework	Time blocks for each activity
10 minutes		Welcome and Introductions Notes Goals for the day Today's Agenda
10 minutes		Table Introductions Exercise
10 minutes		Demographics Who's in the room? Keypad Polling
15 minutes		Values Discussion We want to anchor the discussion with these values
5 minutes		Priorities Keypad polling
20 minutes		Presentation We want to share information that participants can perform
15-20 minutes		Issues Identification Exercise Collecting and sharing thoughts
10 minutes		Consensus
5 minutes		Priorities Keypad polling
15-20 minutes		Priority Issues Discussion and Deliberation
15-20 minutes		Responsibility Accountability Actions Holding Participants to their choices
10 minutes		Report Out This is what we heard today
10 minutes		Priorities Keypad polling
5 minutes		Next Steps Evaluation

Total time: 3 hours to 3 hours, 15 minutes

Figure J: Agenda Framework. Source: Hubert Morgan

Resources

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

www.nirpc.org

United States Department of Transportation

Informing People Through Outreach and Organization, Section 1.A.B: Involving Persons with Disabilities

http://www.planning.dot.gov/PublicInvolvement/pi_documents/1a-b.asp

Easter Seals Project ACTION

www.projectaction.org

Public Participation Plan 2013 Resolution