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Regional Development Authority Considers Funding Requests from Airport, Town of Porter

The Gary/Chicago International Airport and the Town of Porter make their cases for nearly \$50 million in economic development projects in Northwest Indiana.

Crown Point (April 19, 2011) – At today’s quarterly board meeting, the Board of Directors of the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) accepted grant applications from the Gary/Chicago International Airport and the Town of Porter which, if approved, would spur approximately \$47.6 million in construction and development activity in Lake and Porter Counties over the next several years.

Gary/Chicago International Airport has requested \$30 million from the RDA to help fund its \$153 million runway expansion project. According to Interim Airport Director Steve Landry, the \$30 million would be used for three major projects in 2011 and 2012: the construction of a vehicle overpass and two railroad bridges so that railroad tracks currently blocking the runway expansion can be moved. These projects would generate approximately 1,000 construction-related jobs and nearly \$130 million in total economic impact over the next three years, Landry said. Landry added that the entire project would not be possible without the support of the RDA.

While the Board only accepted, not approved, the application today, its Chairman, Leigh Morris, reiterated the promise he made in 2010 at the release of airport’s new strategic plan. “Dirt will fly by the Fourth of July,” he said. “What that means is that you will see construction activity at the Gary Airport this summer.”

The Town of Porter has applied for a \$17.6 million grant for the next phase of its Gateway to the Dunes Project, which town officials said is advancing rapidly. In fact,

Porter asked that if possible about \$4 million be expedited so that the town can piggyback on Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) projects in the area. INDOT will complete new bridges over state routes 12 and 20 by Memorial Day, and Porter is seeking immediate funding to build the stretch of the Dunes Kankakee Trail between the two new spans. Given funding, Porter could also construct the Dunes Kankakee Trail trailhead in concert with a \$1 million INDOT project which will convert the entrance road to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore from four lanes to two with a trail. Additionally, Porter is seeking expedited funds for further land acquisition for the Dunes Kankakee Trail, Indiana 49 reconstruction, and for engineering and design work on the proposed Gateway Development Area.

“The Gateway to the Dunes is significant beyond the project itself,” Morris said. “It presents a wonderful opportunity to give the whole region a ‘front door.’”

In other business, the Board accepted a proposal from RDA Executive Director Bill Hanna establishing a “Buy Northwest Indiana” policy encouraging grant recipients to utilize Northwest Indiana businesses for employees, goods and services, and requiring them to report on their efforts to do so. The policy also creates an even playing field for local contractors from Lake and Porter Counties to compete for work funded in part by the RDA. Along similar lines, the Board also encouraged further development of an internal system to track the impact of its spending on wages and employment in Northwest Indiana.

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About the Regional Development Authority

Established in 2005 through a bipartisan effort including Governor Mitchell E. Daniels, Congressman Peter J. Visclosky, key state legislators and local elected officials, the RDA is quasi-governmental, development entity entrusted to make public investment decisions within a regional framework for supporting catalytic infrastructure projects and inducing private sector investment. For more information, visit <http://www.in.gov/rda/>