

Technical Planning Committee
NIRPC Lake Michigan Room
YouTube Recording:

https://www.youtube.com/live/1rGjSQcu3JA?si=sLqFt_M3PjjVLiLJ

March 4, 2025

Minutes

Kevin Breitzke called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Kevin Breitzke (Porter County), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), Mark O'Dell (Chesterton), Dean Button (Hammond), Mary Tanis (Dyer), Max Rehlander (Valparaiso), Bob Thompson (Valpo Transit), George Topoll (Union Township), Kelly Wenger (NICTD), David Wright (GPTC), Martin Bobcek (Porter County), and Duane Alverson (Lake County) were present.

Don Oliphant, Rodney Harris, Scott Pruitt, Alex Olesker, Chris Harris, Chris Nugent, Ryan Lisek (DCI), Jeff Huett, Terry Martin, and Chris Murphy were also present.

NIRPC staff present were Tom Vander Woude, Grace Benninger, Eman Ibrahim, Stephen Hughes, Charles Bradsky, Scott Weber, Mitch Barloga, Anne Weitgenant, Meredith Stilwell, and Flor Baum.

On a motion by Mary Tanis, second by Bob Thompson, the Transportation Committee (TC) approved the February 4, 2025, meeting minutes, as presented.

There were no public comments.

Presentation

Kelly Wenger (NICTD) presented on the NICTD Monon Corridor and Strategic Plan Update. The commuter rail project received a \$945M budget. The southern extension has four new stations and is almost 7.8 mi. Approximately 90% of the construction is complete. The Hammond Gateway Station building, parking lot, and the South Shore Line platform have been completed. The West Lake bridge structures, track slot, South Hammond Station, Munster/Ridge Station, and at-grade highway grade crossing are substantially complete. The overhead Catenary System, signaling system, and communications systems are ongoing.

Additionally, the NICTD Strategic Business Plan is being updated. The plan was adopted in May 2014, providing a 20-year investment strategy that identified the following:

- Transit-supportive land use policies
- Strategies to provide faster, more frequent, and reliable service
- Service improvements for existing customers and identified growth areas

The plan also addressed a financial strategy and implementation. Many of the 2014 recommendations have been achieved, and changes in commuter behavior and telework require adaptation of business strategies. The 2025 Strategic Plan goal development will identify new goals. The planning process, along with stakeholder initiatives, will be executed in three phases that have an added focus on goal setting,

strategy refinement, and strategy prioritization. For more information, please contact Wendy at kelly.wenger@nictd.com.

Planning

Eman Ibrahim presented on the NWI 2050+ Land Use & Housing Summary. The 2025 Land Use & Housing Summary Report condenses the NWI 2050+ chapter and focuses on the following: population, affordable housing, urban services, and public transportation.

NWI's projected population growth is 900K by 2050. The ideal housing density for this growth is four to five units per acre, which would use only 40% of the land compared to the existing average of two units per acre. Promoting higher-density development can help conserve land. The distribution of required housing units by 2050 was discussed. 50K units are needed by 2050. Therefore, the required density is 5 du/acre. However, the current density is 1.97 du/acre. The vacancy rate in NWI is 10%, under 33K units. Affordable housing is limited in the region. Households earning between \$25K and \$49,999 are limited to older housing, while those making over \$75K only have options in the \$75K to \$150K price range. Increasing the variety and supply of higher-priced housing could free up housing units for lower- and middle-income households. It is recommended that communities establish urban service areas to maintain gradual service growth and appropriate residential density. Large-lot development can constrain logical city growth and the cost-effective extension of municipal services. Policies should accommodate low-density residential uses as planned developments in areas unlikely to receive urban services or as a temporary solution with plans to urbanize. Public transportation and development can serve to promote development. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and the Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC) BMX could influence density. Transit-oriented development can increase with projects like Valparaiso's V-Line. The completion of the West Lake Corridor will stabilize developed areas and could boost growth near key transit stations. For more information, please contact Eman at eibrahim@nirpc.org.

Programming

Charles Bradsky and Stephen Hughes spoke on the selection of projects for the FY 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Draft. From November through February, NIRPC staff reviewed and scored the project applications and met with working groups (formerly known as topical committees) to finalize the scores. The draft Program of Projects was presented to the TC for review. NIRPC staff expect this program to become the basis for the draft TIP.

There were 30 applications for highway and environmental funds totaling \$40M in FY-29 and \$40,800,000 in FY-30. All new highway projects phases in FY-29 and FY-30 are associated with large legacy projects that have already received NIRPC funding for Preliminary Engineering (PE), Right of Way (ROW), or Construction (CN). No new highway projects are recommended. New projects or project phases recommended to be included in the 2026-2030 TIP are as follows:

- Air Quality—NIRPC Air Quality Public Education. Funding Amount: \$378K annually in 2029 and 2030. This program addresses the ongoing need to reduce vehicle emissions in the region. While the funding is awarded to

NIRPC, a significant portion is sub-awarded to Drive Clean Indiana (DCI), and the program benefits every community.

- Planning
 - NIRPC Road Safety Audits – Will be funded \$80K annually in 2029 & 2030. NIRPC will use this funding in partnership with local public agencies to complete Road Safety Audits (RSAs) at high-crash locations. The RSAs will identify effective safety improvement projects, building a pipeline of projects for future NIRPC or INDOT NOFAs.
 - Gary Airport Road Relocation Study – Will be funded \$500K in 2027. This does not provide or guarantee funding for CN.
- Roadway Reconstruction – Will receive funding of \$4,865,625 in 2029 for the Portage Central Ave Reconstruction Phase 3 Legacy project.
- New Roadways – The following are all legacy projects programmed in NIRPC's Long Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan.
 - Schererville's Kennedy Ave Ph IV project will receive funding of \$9,478,856 in 2030.
 - Porter County's Willowcreek Rd Ph II project will receive funding for a bridge over SR 130 for \$10M in 2030.
 - St. John Cline Ave from 101st to 93rd will receive funding of \$7,593,750 in 2030.
 - La Porte Lake Street Extension will receive funding of \$1,600,556 in 2029.
 - La Porte Polk Street Extension will receive funding of \$3,673,636 in 2030.

49 applications were submitted from transit operators requesting \$53,528,906 in FY-29 funds and \$55,761,745 in FY-30 funds, exceeding the federal funding amounts available during those years by 20%. NIRPC staff will prioritize funding for Operating Assistance first and preventive maintenance second. After meeting the priorities above, Capital Projects will be funded if possible.

After the TC reviews it, the Program of Projects will be developed into the FY 26-30 TIP document. The draft TIP will be released for a 30-day public comment period from March 31 through April 29, 2025. The TIP will be presented at the May 6 TC meeting to recommend approval at the May 15 Commission meeting. The TIP will be submitted to the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) for final approval.

The TC noted errors and omissions for some NICTD and GPTC projects within the draft TIP.

On motion by Kelly Wenger, second by David Wright, the TC approved recommending the release of the draft TIP of FY 2026-2030 for public comment, contingent on the correction of errors, omissions, and reconciling balances for NICTD and GPTC projects within the draft TIP before going to public comment.

Staff Updates & Reports from Planning Partners

Tom Vander Woude reported on legislation potentially suspending the requirement to conduct emissions testing in Lake and Porter Counties. Scott Weber (NIRPC) has researched potential implications for NIRPC work. Future updates will be shared.

Tom Vander Woude reported on Drive Clean Indiana. For up-to-date information, visit www.drivecleanindiana.org.

Announcements

Announcements were made.

Adjournment

Hearing no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:36 a.m.

The next Transportation Committee meeting is slated for May 6, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in the NIRPC building.