

Transportation Committee  
NIRPC Lake Michigan Room  
May 6, 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), Bob Thompson (Valpo Transit), Kay Nelson (Forum), George Topoll (Union Township), David Wright (GPTC), and Martin Bobcek (Porter County) were present.

Doug Ross (Post Tribune), Jenny Monroe, Scott Sandstrom, Melody Panos (INDOT), Sandra Flum (INDOT), Chris Nugent, Ryan Lisek (DCI), Jenna Ambrosia (DCI), Jeff Huett, and Terry Martin were also present.

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

On a motion by Dean Button, seconded by Mary Tanis, the committee approved the minutes from the March 4th meeting with a minor correction regarding the exclusion of bridge replacement projects from the 2026 - 2030 TIP due to insufficient funding.

There were no public comments.

**Presentation**

Scott Sandstrom, consultant study manager with CDM Smith, presented an update on the ProPEL US 30 West study in partnership with INDOT. The study covers segments of US 30 from SR 49 to Beech Road and US 31 from West County Road 700 N to the US 30/31 interchange. He emphasized the ongoing collaborative process, which has included over two years of public and stakeholder engagement to inform long-term transportation investments. The study is not intended to identify a single build alternative but rather a set of reasonable options for future project consideration. The current focus is on Level 3 screening, which includes an 8-step process to evaluate and refine alternatives. Fifteen planning segments were identified based on intersection function, traffic patterns, and land use. Several similar intersection types were prescreened, and non-critical improvements were removed from the Level 3 packages. Improvement packages were developed for each segment, balancing safety, mobility, and access, in alignment with INDOT's guidelines. Key considerations included access management, interchange spacing, and local transportation plans. Facility types under consideration range from major arterials to freeways. Evaluation of alternatives focused on conflict point reduction, travel time, and impacts to driveways and local access. The Draft Level 3 Alternatives Analysis was published in November, and public comments have been incorporated. The study is expected to conclude later this year. For more information, please visit [www.propelus30.com](http://www.propelus30.com).

**Planning**

Tom Vander Woude spoke on Resolution #25-08: FY26 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), which serves as NIRPC's core planning document, as required by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). The UPWP functions as the approved work plan for MPO staff and outlines planning tasks and financial allocations for the fiscal year spanning July 2025 to June 2026. It addresses key surface transportation challenges in Northwest Indiana and implements strategies from NIRPC's long-range plan while aligning with federal priorities.

The FY26 UPWP included several revisions from the prior year. Task budgets were updated to reflect actual available funding rather than estimates, and project timelines were adjusted to account for completed or expected work in FY25. Based on guidance from the Indiana Division of the Federal Highway Administration and Region 5 of the Federal Transit Administration, the document was revised to remove references to Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs), rescinded Executive Orders, and climate change-specific tasks. The focus shifted toward established federal legislation and broader Air Quality analysis. Funding allocations were detailed in the document, with primary sources including Federal Metropolitan Planning (PL) and Section 5303 transit planning funds totaling \$2.4 million for FY25, with an 80/20 federal-local split. Additionally, "flex" funds from programs such as CMAQ, HSIP, and STBG were designated for special projects. Per IIJA/BIL requirements, 2.5% of planning funds—approximately \$57,000—were set aside for Complete Streets initiatives in FY26. These funds will support active transportation planning, including technical assistance, data collection, and public engagement. Additional UPWP-funded projects include the Marquette Greenway, which is supported by READI and RAISE grants, and road safety audits funded through HSIP. Local Planning Agency (LPA) assistance for special plans, such as corridor or complete streets planning, will also be managed through the UPWP, aligning with the goals of the NWI 2050 plan. The committee discussed the overall framework and adjustments within the UPWP, including the \$77,000 decrease in federal funding and the necessary reallocations. A discussion also took place regarding the allocation of 5307 transit funding among Illinois, Wisconsin, and various Chicago-area transit operators.

On motion by Dean Button, seconded by Kay Nelson, the Transportation Committee (TC) approved to recommend the approval of Res 25-08 to the Full Commission/Executive Board, including adjustments for a \$77,000 decrease in federal funding and the reallocation of funds to support complete streets and transit projects. The motion passed, confirming committee support for the revised UPWP.

Scott Weber spoke on Resolution #25-09: Adoption of Air Quality Conformity Determination Report. The committee discussed the Air Quality Conformity determination for the NWI 2050+ Amendment #2 and the Fiscal Year 2026–2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), in response to the nonattainment designation for ozone in parts of Northwest Indiana. Specifically, five townships in Lake County and eight in Porter County were designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as nonattainment areas under the 2015 ozone standard. Additionally, all Lake and Porter counties remained maintenance areas under the 2008 standard, and LaPorte County under the 1997 standard. These designations required all new TIPs in the region to meet conformity requirements under Section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act. NIRPC collaborated with the Interagency Consultation Group (ICG) to fulfill these requirements, including INDOT, IDEM, FHWA, FTA, and the US EPA representatives. Together, they ensured that regionally significant, non-exempt transportation projects listed in the FY 2026–2030 TIP would not cause or contribute to ozone precursor emissions (NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC) above the limits set in Indiana's State Implementation Plan (SIP). NIRPC confirmed that the emissions projections for the required analysis years remained at or below SIP budgets.

Public engagement was conducted from March 22 to April 20, 2025, as NIRPC's Engage NWI policy required. Three public meetings were held—in Porter County, Merrillville, and Michigan City—resulting in no public comments but two formal comments from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). These comments requested the inclusion of project lengths in descriptions and confirmation that all listed projects appeared in the TIP. Both issues were addressed by NIRPC staff. Adopting this resolution was necessary for the FY 2026–2030 TIP to move forward. FHWA cannot issue the formal Conformity Determination Letter—estimated to take 35–40 days—until the NIRPC Commission adopts the resolution.

On motion by Kay Nelson, seconded by Tom Schmitt, the TC recommended the adoption of Res 25-09 to demonstrate Air Quality Conformity for the *NWI 2050+ Amendment #2* and the FY 2026–2030 TIP. A technical correction was noted for correction before the May 15<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting.

Scott Weber spoke on Resolution #25-10: Adoption of NWI 2050+ Amendment No. 2. The committee discussed the adoption of *NWI 2050+ Amendment #2*, emphasizing the need to meet Air Quality Conformity requirements and maintain consistency with federal regulations. As required by 23 CFR § 450.326, a Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) must align with its Long-Range Transportation Plan. Since NIRPC was adopting a new FY 2026–2030 TIP, it became necessary to amend the *NWI 2050+ Plan* to ensure consistency between the documents. This amendment served as a technical adjustment to clearly link the TIP to the plan by updating the Air Quality Conformity determination reference date to May 15, 2025. The amendment was prompted by the inclusion of new or significantly modified regionally significant, non-exempt projects in the TIP that were not previously reflected in the NWI 2050+ Plan. Before the TIP could be formally adopted, NIRPC was required to amend the long-range plan to maintain compliance with federal Air Quality standards.

Public engagement for Amendment #2 followed the Engage NWI policy and included a 30-day public comment period from March 22 to April 20, 2025. Three public meetings were held at the Porter County Government Center, the Merrillville Branch of the Lake County Public Library, and the Michigan City Public Library. No public comments were received that specifically addressed the amendment. The TIP document, which is updated every two years, outlines funded transportation projects and incorporates input from local agencies, stakeholders, and federal funding sources. It remained available for public review and reflected ongoing public participation efforts. This resolution is essential to move forward with the new FY 2026–2030 TIP, as the TIP could not take effect until the Federal Highway Administration issued a formal Conformity Determination Letter.

On motion by Dean Button, seconded by George Topoll, Res 25-10 was recommended for adoption by the NIRPC Full Commission/Executive Board on May 15, 2025.

### **Programming**

Charles Bradsky and Stephen Hughes spoke on Resolution # 25-11: FY 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program. The Transportation Committee discussed the adoption of the Fiscal Year 2026–2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which serves as NIRPC's short-range plan for allocating federal funds to surface transportation projects across Northwest Indiana. Updated every two years, the TIP outlined roadway and bridge rehabilitation investments, Air Quality improvement, Complete Streets, and multi-use trails while maintaining a balanced budget and avoiding federal debt. The TIP was developed in accordance with the federal Infrastructure Investment and JOBS Act (IIJA) and other applicable funding programs. Northwest Indiana included six urbanized areas as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. NIRPC managed federal aid for three: the Indiana portions of Chicago, Valparaiso–Shorewood Forest, and Michigan City–La Porte urban areas. INDOT managed federal aid for the smaller areas. The Lake of the Four Seasons urban area was recently reclassified by the Census Bureau, which impacted funding allocations. Despite this, transformational projects such as Kennedy Avenue, Willowcreek Road in Porter County, and Cline Avenue were approved to advance, despite funding limitations.

Transit projects in the TIP were funded through various FTA programs, including Section 5307 (Urbanized Area Formula), 5310 (Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities), 5337 (State of Good Repair), and 5339 (Bus and Bus Facilities). Funding eligibility varied by location, with fixed guideway system operators such as NICTD being the only recipients eligible for 5337 funds. Projects included technology upgrades, substation repairs, vehicle leases and replacements, and maintenance initiatives to preserve systems in a state of good repair. Transit operators prioritized projects in the following order: operating assistance, preventive maintenance, and capital projects. FY 2029–2030 applications resulted in \$166 million in funding requests, while only \$80.8 million was available, underscoring a significant gap between need and resources. The committee emphasized the importance of preventive maintenance and noted the funding disparities during their discussion of project adjustments.

Public engagement followed NIRPC's *Engage NWI* Public Participation Plan. The TIP was made available for public review during a 30-day comment period from March 22 to April 20, 2025. Three in-person public meetings were held across Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. Although seven people attended, no formal comments were submitted. The TIP document and project list were also promoted through NIRPC's website, press releases, and social media channels. The committee reviewed the public outreach process and noted the need for improved transparency and communication between NIRPC transit staff and transit operators, particularly regarding project details and opportunities for public input. Suggestions were made to enhance engagement through revised public participation strategies, such as distributing flyers with QR codes at transit locations and exceeding minimum requirements for public meetings.

As a result of this thorough and collaborative process, on motion by Dean Button, seconded by Mary Tanis, the committee passed a favorable recommendation of Res 25-11, supporting adoption of the FY 2026–2030 TIP. The resolution was scheduled to be presented to the NIRPC Commission for approval on May 15, 2025, with final approval by USDOT and INDOT expected by mid-summer.

### **Reports from Planning Partners**

Ryan Lisek (DCI) announced that funding for DC fast-charging and level two charging stations will soon be available. Applications are due by June 30, and a road show will be scheduled from June 9 to 20 to promote the initiative. Air Quality Awareness Week and the Closing the Gap Tour are also scheduled for June.

### **Other Business, Staff Announcements, and Upcoming Meetings**

Staff updates include progress on the Marquette Greenway project, successful workshops on the Sensible Tools Handbook+, and plans for future workshops to increase participation from local officials. A second round of road safety audits will be conducted this summer, focusing on high-crash locations, with funding requiring a local match of approximately \$1,700 per location, and a virtual transit operators meeting is scheduled for Thursday, the 8th, at 10 a.m. A new census data page on the website simplifies access to community snapshot data, aiding in planning and grant applications using the most recent available data.

### **Announcements**

The committee made announcements, wishing Kay Nelson a happy birthday and expressing gratitude for her contribution to the Transportation Committee.

### **Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m. The next Transportation Committee meeting is slated for August 5, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. in the NIRPC building.

## References

1. [Meeting Agenda](#)



2. [YouTube Livestream](#)



3. [ProPEL US 30](#)



4. [Drive Clean Indiana](#)

