

NIRPC Executive Board Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
Minutes of the August 20, 2026, Executive Board Meeting

Call to Order

Chair Austin Bonta called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

New Appointments to the Commission

Dave Hollenbeck announced there were no new appointments to the Commission.

Roll Call - Taken by Candice Eklund

Present

The 10 Commissioners on the Executive Board in attendance are listed below:

- Austin Bonta, City of Portage
- Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor
- Denise Ebert, Town of Wanatah
- Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor
- Anthony Ferraro, Governor's Appointee
- Joe Haney, La Porte County Commissioner
- Courtney Parthun, City of La Porte
- David Phelps, Town of Beverly Shores
- Tom Schmitt, Town of Schererville
- Jim Ton, Town of Chesterton

Absent

- Wendy Mis, Town of Munster

The 4 other Commissioners present at the meeting are listed below:

- Jim Burge, Town of Porter
- Robert Carnahan, Town of Cedar Lake
- John Matwyshyn, La Porte County Surveyor
- George Topoll, Union Township

Matt Deitchley, representing INDOT, was also present.

Kingsbury and Pines have appointed no representatives to NIRPC.

Staff present included Ty Warner, Kathy Luther, Tom Vander Woude, Mitch Barloga, Stephen Hughes, Scott Weber, Charles Bradsky, Meredith Stilwell, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the July 16, 2026, Executive Board meeting were approved on motion by Joe Haney and seconded by Kevin Breitzke.

Leadership – Austin Bonta, Mayor of Portage

Austin Bonta led a discussion on the August 11 derecho, often referred to as the “inland hurricane”, when he talked about the significant impact across Northwest Indiana. Community leaders shared experiences highlighting residents coming together in strong local response efforts, volunteerism, and collaboration among residents, police, and fire departments, with George Topoll also noting the extensive damage to the cemetery in Union Township. Mayor Bonta shared lessons learned about electric grid restoration and utility response processes. David Phelps noted that the Town of Beverly Shores is developing an emergency plan based on lessons learned during the widespread storm. Joe Haney reported widespread damage throughout La Porte County, which limited mutual aid from neighboring communities, making it very challenging, but that the residents remained understanding. Mr. Haney acknowledged support from Governor Braun's office and the DNR team that was sent out for two days.

Anthony Ferraro provided an update on the state's storm response. He reported that he has spoken with many NIRPC Commissioners since August 11 and has been actively working to secure resources to assist communities with response efforts. Homeland security is still operating at a Level 3, which is 12-hour workdays. Governor Braun called out the National Guard, and Anthony commended Colonel Sutton for his exemplary leadership and coordination with state troopers. The state's mission is to clear designated roadways for emergency vehicle access. The National Guard also integrated its efforts with NIPSCO, who has been great to work with and has provided access to response crews. As of today, response operations in Porter County are complete. Lake County is being addressed today, with state access crews working alongside NIPSCO to identify and confirm safe work areas so they can proceed with debris removal. Anthony expects that the emergency response phase could conclude as early as tomorrow, depending on conditions and available information. A last call has been extended to all Lake County communities. Any remaining needs must be communicated to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) by 1:00 p.m. today so that state resources can be appropriately assigned. If no additional requests are received, those crews will stand down. Anthony also acknowledged INDOT's efforts in coordinating response activities with the state and thanked Matt Deitchley and his team for their support.

As operations transition from response to recovery, Anthony strongly encouraged communities to participate in the upcoming Recovery 101 webinar. The webinar will explain which communities are eligible for available state assistance, outline the process for submitting requests, and provide information that may potentially lower the local portion. Indiana is pursuing a Major Disaster Declaration from the President, which would unlock FEMA recovery funding. While the state is not yet at that stage, Governor Braun has spoken with President Trump, and Indiana has already received an Emergency Declaration, which provides direct assistance to the state and supports emergency response efforts. However, this declaration does not yet make FEMA recovery funding available. Anthony emphasized the importance of every community to report their storm-related damage through Indiana 211 to access assistance and community resources. Municipalities and government agencies should report their damage directly to Homeland Security through the proper reporting channels. These reports are critical because federal assistance is contingent upon meeting established damage thresholds and eligibility criteria. Congressman Mrvan, Senators Todd Young and Jim Banks, and their respective staffs are working in tandem with Governor Braun and state officials to support Indiana's request for a Major Disaster Declaration.

Anthony noted that the severe flooding being experienced downstate is 'biblical', resulting in loss of life and extensive damage. Citizens need to be encouraged to report through Indiana 211 and to work with their county Emergency Management Agencies (EMAs) and state officials to complete damage assessments quickly. He also reminded Commissioners about the webinars scheduled for Lake and Porter Counties today and La Porte County tomorrow, where they can participate directly with Homeland Security and the Governor's office. The webinars will be recorded and made available for those unable to attend. It was stressed that recoveries will be a long-term process lasting weeks and months. Please contact Anthony Ferraro with any questions. Anthony said that questions have begun to come in regarding IDEM requirements for storm debris management. He encouraged communities, counties, highway departments, and waste management facilities to submit any information to him, and he will get answers.

INDOT – Matt Deitchley

Matt Deitchley added that INDOT continues debris removal operations on state roads day and night. He noted that some communities contacted INDOT to ask if they could clean up the state roads. Matt said they could discuss it, but they could not be reimbursed. Another challenge is that some residents are cleaning up their yards and placing all of their debris on state roads. Contact Matt with questions.

Matt Deitchley reported that, in addition to clearing roads, they are restoring traffic lights when power is restored. He also noted that there are no state roads closed in the NIRPC three-county area. INDOT received many requests for stop signs during the power outages, but they don't have them in stock because they don't have the resources to deliver them. When the lights are restored and the stop signs are there, it can create challenges.

Drive Clean Indiana (DCI) Contract: Kathy Luther presented the annual contract, noting that although the grant has been approved in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for multiple years, NIRPC renews

it annually. This contract funds public education and outreach efforts related to air quality, as well as the technical Green Fleets program. This contract enables DCI to continue to operate both programs. The contract provides \$363,900 in federal funding. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Tom Schmitt, the Executive Board approved the DCI contract.

Marquette Greenway Supplemental Agreement No. 3: Mitch Barloga presented Supplemental Agreement No. 3, an amendment to NIRPC's contract with Butler, Fairman, and Seufert to move funding from another project to support property acquisition assessments within the City of Michigan City. The amendment increased the contract amount by \$56,515, bringing the total contract price to \$1,017,270. The additional funding is necessary because the original assessments lapsed during a 15-month federal government delay, requiring the assessment updates. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Kevin Breitzke, the Executive Board approved the Marquette Greenway Supplemental Agreement No. 3.

Transportation – Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor

Kevin Breitzke reported that the Transportation Committee met on August 4, 2026, and heard various updates from GPTC, including the GPTC 2025 annual impact report. The next Transportation Committee meeting is scheduled for September 1, 2026.

The Transportation Committee recommended the three resolutions below to the Executive Board.

- **Resolution #26-10:** Amend *Engage NWI* Public Participation Plan (PPP). Stephen Hughes reported that no comments were received during the public comment period held from July 9-23. This is a federally required document for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) that outlines NIRPC's public engagement process. As part of NIRPC's 2025 certification review, NIRPC received a corrective action requiring the PPP to be updated to meet the requirements of Section 23 CFR 450.316, including specific outreach strategies to engage traditionally underserved populations. A draft was sent to the FHWA for review, and they replied that it represented sufficient progress but requested additional information demonstrating that the methods proposed in Appendix A are being used by NIRPC staff. Appendix A outlines how NIRPC identified those traditional underserved populations and how to find high concentrations of individuals who qualify as underserved. On motion by Bill Emerson and seconded by Jim Ton, the Executive Board approved Resolution #26-10.
- **Resolution #26-11:** Approve a Technical Amendment to *NWI 2050+*, Adding a System Performance Report. Scott Weber presented this resolution, which amends *NWI 2050+* by adding a System Performance Report. He explained that this report is being added to *NWI 2050+* because it's a federally required component of a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and is intended to evaluate the condition and performance of the transportation system against established federal performance targets. The reports also document progress made since the previous performance assessment. Scott noted that the addition of the System Performance Report is the third and final part of a corrective action defined during NIRPC's federal planning certification review. The USDOT, FHWA, and FTA reported they informally reviewed the report and advised NIRPC that the new report will satisfy the correct action requirement. On motion by Bill Emerson and seconded by Tom Schmitt, the Executive Board approved Resolution #26-11.
- **Resolution #26-12:** FY 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment #26-08.1 and 26-08.5. Charles Bradsky reported that amendment #26-08.1 is for the exempt projects and amendment #26-08.5 is for transit projects. There were no comments received from the Interagency Consultation Group (ICG) or from the public. The public comment period ran from July 2 to 22. On motion by Bill Emerson and seconded by Jim Ton, the Executive Board approved Resolution #26-12.

Kevin Breitzke ended his report with various announcements, one of which included news that Union Pacific Corp announced its intent to pursue the acquisition of Norfolk and Southern Corp and its railroad. Ty Warner reported that, on behalf of NIRPC, he registered as a party of record last month as part of the Surface Transportation review process, which allows the right to comment on that merger, should there be comments. If communities have concerns, comments, or suggestions, and want to generate them into a formal comment, the NIRPC body would be formally part of that process. Jim Ton commended Mr. Warner for his foresight in putting NIRPC on the record to be involved in these conversations. NIRPC would be glad to collect and compile responses on behalf of the communities in Northwest Indiana.

Economy & Place – George Topoll, Union Township

George Topoll reported that the Economy & Place committee has not met since the last Commission meeting. The next Economy & Place meeting is scheduled for October 14.

Environment – Bill Emerson

Bill Emerson reported that the Environment Committee met on August 8, where Kathy Luther updated the committee on strategies for the environmental chapter of the *NWI 2050+*. They have also planned strategy workshops on September 3 and October 11. Jen Birchfield presented on the Great Lakes Community Partnership grant program. The deadline to submit an application was extended to September 11. The next Environment meeting is scheduled for November 5

Other Business

No other business was discussed

Announcements

Bob Carnahan shared that his brother recently passed away and asked for him and his family to be kept in their thoughts and prayers.

Hearing no other business, Austin Bonta adjourned the meeting at 10:13 a.m. The next meeting will be an Executive Board meeting on September 17, 2026.

The video recording for this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [August 20, 2026, Commission Meeting](#).