

# Coordinated transit plan for NWI




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## Executive summary

This Coordinated Transit Plan is an effort to improve the accessibility of the overall transit system in Northwestern Indiana to individuals with disabilities, people who are low income, and people who are elderly. In order to improve the accessibility of the system, this plan used data and other information collected from transit operators, human service organizations, partner agencies, and the public to develop a set of regional needs and service gaps. These needs and service gaps were then matched to proposed goals to improve the connectivity and efficiency of the transit system and ultimately, funding priorities.

While the transit system in Northwestern Indiana covers a large geographic area, there are several limitations that have large impacts on the lives of individuals that rely on transit as their only source of transportation, namely people with disabilities, people who are elderly, and people who are low income. Most of the region is covered by demand response service, however these services do not provide the same level of freedom and flexibility as a fixed route system with complementary paratransit. Additionally, individuals who rely on transit are limited in their travel by the limitations of the transit networks service area and operational hours. In Northwestern Indiana, few providers offer services that cross county lines, and travel between cities is usually limited. These problems are increasingly aggravated by developing outside of the urban core, especially when human service agencies and medical facilities develop into unincorporated areas. Services between fixed route and demand response operators can be made more efficient by expanding fixed-route and paratransit services into communities that have the density to support higher levels of service, allowing demand response operators to operate more efficiently by focusing on longer city-to-city, county-to-county trips. Additionally, by working across program areas outside of transit, NIRPC and local decision makers can incentivize developing within the urban core, to curb unsustainable growth.

The transit system in Northwestern Indiana can also be made more efficient by coordinating services between providers. A constant problem among operators is retention of staff, limitations of available vehicles, and access to resources. By consolidating aspects of an operator's services, sharing staff, and sharing vehicles; the regional transit system can grow beyond existing funding limitations. Other coordination methods should also be



*An in-depth summary of demand response and fixed route with complementary paratransit services can be found in the “Transit network: current conditions” section of this document*

*First mile-last mile commonly is used to refer to the gap between where a bus drops off an individual and their desired location. Often this specifically relates to pedestrian infrastructure or connections between regional transit services and local services.*

*ADA transition plans are a requirement of FHWA, designed to encourage communities to self-evaluate barriers to the accessibility of people with disabilities. The transition plan is designed to bridge the gap from outdated infrastructure to federally-mandated accessibility requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.*

considered like working with medical professionals or human service providers to build efficiencies, such as coordinated multi-user dispatching, contributions to local match, data-sharing, trainings, and others.


In addition to the entire regional network, more attention needs to be paid to the individual accessibility of each transit system. Persons with disabilities frequently encounter problems accessing transit when pedestrian infrastructure is lacking. This “first mile - last mile” gap in infrastructure creates a physical barrier between individuals and where they need to go with potentially life-changing consequences. Adequate pedestrian infrastructure is not enough, communities need to have the resources available to improve their pedestrian infrastructure to universal design standards. This can be done by setting aside federal transportation funding for the implementation of locally- developed ADA transition plans, as well as continuing to prioritize funding for pedestrian connections to transit networks, residential areas, job centers, and recreational areas.

Communication continues to be an obstacle in Northwestern Indiana when discussing transit. Traditional methods used for communicating issues about transit or coordination are often ineffective. More effort should be given in providing information about the meetings further in advance than what is typical for other public meetings. Individuals that rely on transit for 100% of their travel often have limited availability for making another trip to attend a meeting. Other opportunities for participation should be explored including utilizing social media, and other online resources to where participants can weigh-in online. Additionally, public participation should be solicited where people are: in transit facilities, on transit vehicles, in public housing, and other places associated with the affected population groups. These considerations should all be made while recognizing that older residents may not have the same level of comfortability with technology. Communication about transit can also be more accessible to the public by coordinating between transit operators to use common language and policies between their services. Participants in this planning effort often indicated that transit services were confusing to learn about. If operators work together to develop common paratransit policies, similar language about their service area and hours, similar fares, and a single place to communicate this information to the public, learning about transit can be less confusing.

Not every resident of Northwestern Indiana has the same transportation needs. Individuals who have been historically left behind in terms of transportation investments should be

prioritized when considering how to grow and expand transit. These groups include people who are elderly, people with disabilities, people who are low-income, people who are ethnic minorities, and veterans. Increasing access between these priority population groups and critical locations area priority. Critical locations include: grocery stores, job centers, educational institutions, medical facilities, shopping districts, and other recreational areas. Inclusion of quality-of-life destinations can be just as important to an individual who relies on transit as the commonly-identified locations like hospitals or grocery stores. The ultimate aim of Northwestern Indiana's transit system should not be merely to connect individuals to necessary services – the desired culmination of our planning effort should be freedom of movement and equity across all modes of transportation.

Lastly, a transit service is limited in its scope by the availability of local match. Local match continues to be a problem for many local transit operators in Northwestern Indiana. In order to have a truly robust and equitable transit system, more local match will be required to leverage more federal funding for transit investments.



*Local match is a portion of money that is required to leverage federal funds in the form of grants. Most federal grants that are available for transit require 50% or 80% of funding for a program to be covered by a local entity.*

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## Introduction

Federal transit law requires that projects selected for funding under the Enhanced Mobility for Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program be "included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan," and that the plan be "developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers and other members of the public" utilizing transportation services. This document, the Northwestern Indiana Coordinated Transit Plan (CTP) was written by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission to meet this federal requirement.

*Human services are broadly defined as a field with the objective of allowing people to stabilize their lives in times of crisis or chronic ongoing challenges. Human service agencies are multidisciplinary, and often are related to social services, housing, counseling, medical services, independent living, and others.*

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) was created in 1965 and functions as a regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as well as a Council of Governments (COG). NIRPC provides planning support to Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties and their 41 municipalities, focusing on issues concerning transportation, the environment, and economic development. NIRPC also functions as the direct recipient for seven public transit operators in Northwestern Indiana. As a direct recipient, NIRPC provides administrative responsibilities associated with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grants, including applying for federal funds on behalf of the subrecipient, providing the administrative work and oversight associated with the grant, and the procurement hurdles required by FTA for purchasing capital items and services. Additionally, NIRPC also provides oversight related to several program areas, for each subrecipient from drug and alcohol testing, ADA compliance, maintenance, and others. A function of NIRPC's role as a direct recipient, is to coordinate and write the CTP in order to receive Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities funding.

*NIRPC is an MPO and a COG. MPOs traditionally are responsible for transportation-related issues, COGs cover a broader variety of services, allowing NIRPC to also focus on: growth and conservation, the environment, human and economic resources, and stewardship and governance.*

The Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities is an FTA program that provides formula funding to states and urbanized areas to assist private, nonprofit, and public groups in meeting the transportation needs of people who are elderly, people with disabilities, and people who are low-income. This plan was developed with coordinating guidance from members of the public and representatives of these groups who work in affiliated human service agencies. Activities eligible for funding within this program include:



*Operating expenses are related to the day-to-day operations of transit. Capital expenses involve the purchase of physical items such as equipment, vehicles, buildings, planning documents, or other 3-rd party services.*



- Operating and capital
- Buses and vans
- Wheelchair lifts, ramps, and securement devices
- Transit-related information technology systems, including scheduling/routing/one-call systems
- Mobility management programs
- Acquisition of transportation services under a contract, lease, or other arrangement

## Transit network: current conditions

The Northwestern Indiana transit network has a wide variety of transit services within its region and many transit providers. Regional transit providers can be broadly categorized by the type of service they provide: demand response or fixed route.

“Demand response” is defined by FTA as “any non-fixed route system of transporting individuals that requires advanced scheduling by the customer, including services provided by public entities, nonprofits, and private providers.”

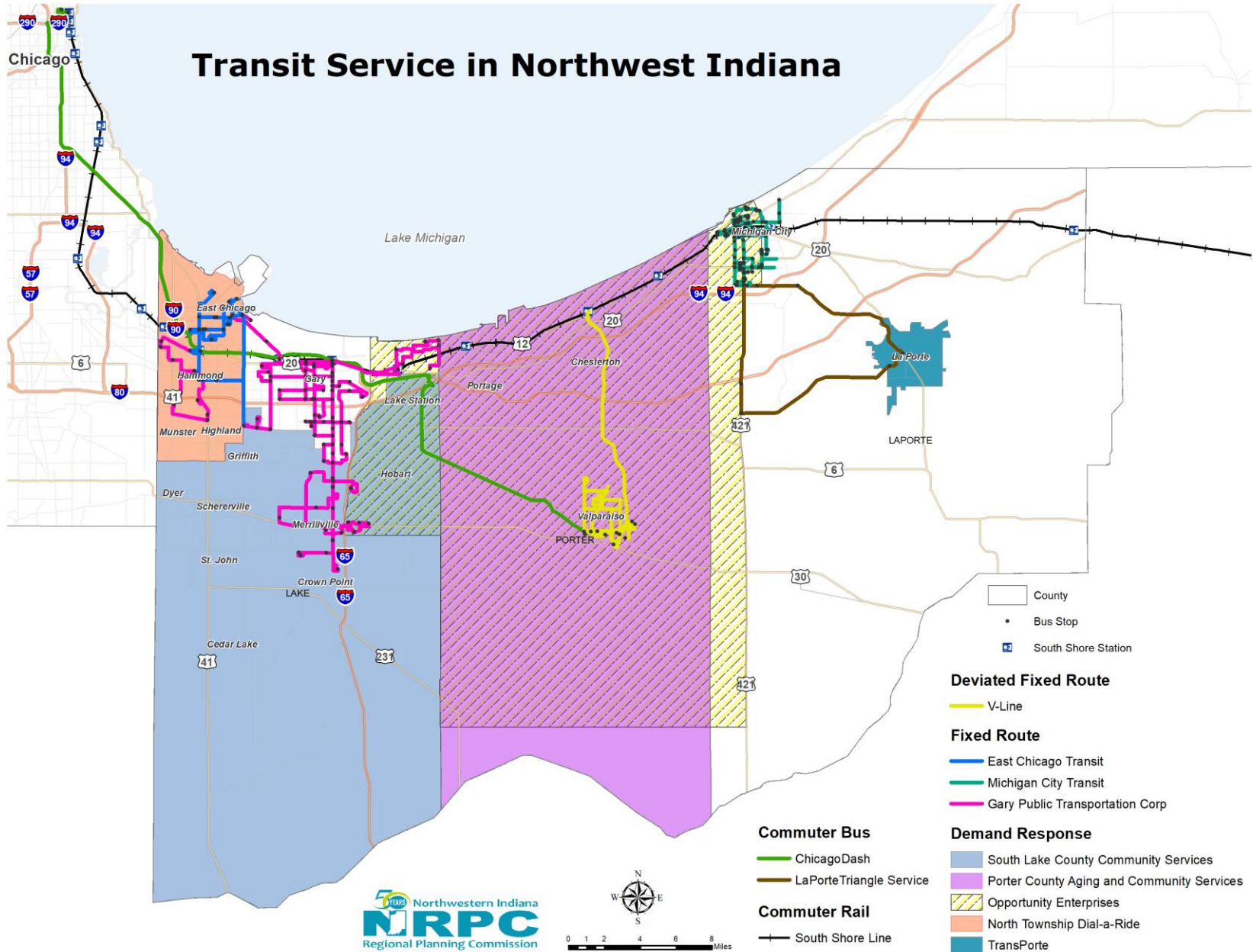
“Fixed route” transit systems operate on a point-to-point predetermined schedule. Fixed route systems can utilize buses, vans, rail or other vehicles. These systems rely on stops with estimated drop-off and pick up times, so users can plan their travel. If a transit provider is operating a fixed route service, they will be required by FTA to provide a comparable complementary paratransit service. Paratransit services must meet the following guidelines within a fixed-route system:

- Service must be provided within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of a fixed route
- Service must be provided within the same dates and times as the fixed route service is available
- Reservations must be available during normal business hours of the operator’s administrative offices, no restrictions on times to make a reservation may be applied
- Fares for a paratransit trip may not exceed twice the typical full fare for the service
- Personal care attendants cannot be charged a fare
- Passengers may not be picked-up more than an hour before or after the requested time, however the transit operator may negotiate a pick-up time

- No restrictions can be made for the purpose of the trip
- Riders may be asked by the operator to determine their eligibility for paratransit services
- Transit providers are required to provide “origin-to-destination” service, meaning that the requested service may need to go beyond a curbside drop-off. If the right criteria are met, transit operators could potentially be required to provide “door-to-door” service.

Frequently, demand response service and the complementary paratransit service required of fixed route providers are confused, or the terms are used interchangeably. However, it is worth noting that this is incorrect. Demand response providers are not under the same, stricter, service guidelines as fixed route providers operating a complementary paratransit system. The following section will detail the transit operators servicing each county in Northwestern Indiana. Each transit operator features a short description of their service as well as a “quick facts” box that uses 2016 [National Transit Database](#) figures to describe their services.

➤ *The [National Transit Database](#) is the primary source for information and statistics related to transit. All transit operators are federally-required to contribute to the database. Annual figures are updated on a two-year lag. 2016 figures are the most recently available dataset for comparing transit providers.*



## Lake county

### East Chicago Transit

East Chicago Transit (ETC) is a service that is provided by the East Chicago city government. ETC provides fixed route and paratransit service throughout the city of East Chicago, with connections to the Gary Public Transit Corporation and the South Shore Train. Currently, using ETC is free for all residents of East Chicago.

#### ECT quick facts

**FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):** Sub-recipient

**Service type:** Fixed-route bus, Paratransit

**Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):** 150,668

**Vehicle revenue miles:** 140,159

**Vehicle revenue hours:** 12,146

**Passengers per hour:** 18.23

**Passenger miles traveled:** 243,876

**Average trip length (miles):** 4.73

**Direct route miles:** 70

**Fare:** Free

### Gary Public Transit Corporation

The Gary Public Transit Corporation (GPTC) is the largest fixed-route bus service in Northwestern Indiana. While GPTC receives a large portion of its local match from the City of Gary, it is a distinctly separate entity from the city government. Like its sister fixed-route agencies, GPTC originally served only residents of the City of Gary, however after the collapse of the Regional Bus Authority in 2012, GPTC pushed for more regional connections in North Lake County. GPTC offers significant levels of service to Hammond, and Merrillville; with limited connections to Highland, Munster, Crown Point, and Hobart. Like many operators in Northwestern Indiana, GPTC often struggles with local match. Currently, GPTC has the infrastructure necessary to aggressively expand service in North Lake County and perhaps South Lake County, however many attempts to gain a dedicated source of funding to the communities it serves have been limited.

#### GPTC quick facts

<b>FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):</b>	Direct
<b>Service type:</b>	Fixed-route bus, Paratransit
<b>Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):</b>	786,362
<b>Vehicle revenue miles:</b>	889,673
<b>Vehicle revenue hours:</b>	64,271
<b>Passengers per hour:</b>	15.85
<b>Passenger miles traveled:</b>	1,053,562
<b>Average trip length (miles):</b>	6.64
<b>Direct route miles:</b>	155
<b>Fare:</b>	\$1.60 for local one-way with free transfers and discounts for “seniors, disabled, Medicare” and students. \$2.25 for regional trips.

### Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD)

The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) is the entity that maintains and operates the South Shore Line. The South Shore Line is a commuter rail line that runs the length of Northwestern Indiana, providing service from Chicago to South Bend, Indiana. In 2016 the South Shore Line received over 3 million unlinked passenger trips, although many of the passengers who boarded the train boarded in station stops outside of the region. NICTD is commonly referred to as a “donor agency,” as the ridership and data generated by their service increases the available FTA formula funds provided in Northwestern Indiana, however it only receives a portion back. NICTD is currently spearheading two transformative projects, double tracking and the West Lake Extension. The double tracking project will double the lines of track between Gary and Michigan City, as well as many station, signal, and power improvements along the way. Double tracking the train allows NICTD to provide more frequent service through implementing express trains that can “pass” slower moving trains, and reduce delays as a new train can “pass” a train that is stalled on the tracks.

#### NICTD quick facts

<b>FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):</b>	Direct recipient
<b>Service type:</b>	Commuter rail
<b>Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):</b>	3,504,080
<b>Vehicle revenue miles:</b>	4,233,598
<b>Vehicle revenue hours:</b>	117,214
<b>Passengers per hour:</b>	29.89
<b>Passenger miles traveled:</b>	113,035,111
<b>Average trip length (miles):</b>	32.26
<b>Direct route miles:</b>	180
<b>Fare:</b>	Between \$3.75 and \$14.25 depending on distance of travel. Discounts are available.

### North Township Dial-a-Ride

Similarly to GPTC, the North Township Dial-a-Ride was a service that was started to fill the void left by the collapse of the Regional Bus Authority. While this service is a subrecipient of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, its day to day services are administered out of the North Township Trustee's office, Frank Mrvan. Currently, the Dial-a-Ride offers demand response service to all communities in North Township including, Highland, Munster, Hammond, East Chicago, and Whiting. Currently, using the service is free.

#### North Township Dial-a-Ride quick facts

FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient): Sub-recipient

Service type: Demand response

Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership): 43,462

Vehicle revenue miles: 228,505

Vehicle revenue hours: 19,518

Passengers per hour: 4.57

Passenger miles traveled: 475,490

Average trip length (miles): 22.15

Direct route miles: N/A (demand response)

Fare: Free

### South Lake County Community Services

South Lake County Community Services (SLCCS) has the largest geographic area of all the Lake County Providers. SLCCS primarily provides service to rural and urban communities that are not currently serviced by the other Lake County operators. SLCCS provides demand response service to Griffith, Dyer, Schererville, Merrillville, Hobart, Lake Station, Crown Point, St. John, Winfield, Cedar Lake, Lowell, and Schneider, as well as the unincorporated areas of Lake County. Like many of the other demand response providers, SLCCS is facing an aging population that has increased need to get to essential services with limited mobility. As more and more of these services are built in low-density, rural areas, outside of the urban core; operating their service becomes less efficient and more expensive. Currently, SLCCS will take residents from South Lake County into North Lake County, or Porter County, but it will not pick up residents that do not live within their service area.

#### SLCCS quick facts

<b>FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):</b>	Sub-recipient
<b>Service type:</b>	Demand response
<b>Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):</b>	41,214
<b>Vehicle revenue miles:</b>	278,696
<b>Vehicle revenue hours:</b>	25,723
<b>Passengers per hour:</b>	1.60
<b>Passenger miles traveled:</b>	889,704
<b>Average trip length (miles):</b>	21.59
<b>Direct route miles:</b>	N/A (demand response)
<b>Fare:</b>	Free to \$7 depending on pick-up location and the age of the client



## Porter County

### ChicaGo Dash

The ChicaGo Dash is another transit service sponsored by the City of Valparaiso. The Dash is a commuter bus service connecting a transit station in downtown Valparaiso to the central business district in Chicago. The Dash has a single pick-up/drop-off location in Valparaiso, and three stops in Downtown Chicago, with no other stops in-between. The service is limited in its pick up and drop off times, offering four buses departing at four times in the morning, each bus making three stops in Chicago to drop off customers, before waiting until the afternoon, where each bus picks up from the three Chicago stations, returning to Valparaiso. The timetable was designed around an average workday with some flexibility to allow users to come in early or potentially stay late.

#### ChicaGo Dash quick facts

**FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):** Sub-recipient

**Service type:** Commuter bus

**Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):** 61,174

**Vehicle revenue miles:** 120,437

**Vehicle revenue hours:** 2,447

**Passengers per hour:** 25.00

**Passenger miles traveled:** 3,179,741

**Average trip length (miles):** 51.98

**Direct route miles:** 104

**Fare:** \$8

### Porter County Aging and Community Services

Porter County Aging and Community Services (PCACS) is a multi-service agency committed to alleviating the needs of people who are elderly in Porter County, however they provide transportation to anyone, providing they have the capacity. The PCACS service area begins and ends at the Porter County border.

#### PCACS quick facts

**FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):** Sub-recipient

**Service type:** Demand response

**Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):** 20,620

**Vehicle revenue miles:** 187,977

**Vehicle revenue hours:** 14,418

**Passengers per hour:** 1.43

**Passenger miles traveled:** 171,774

**Average trip length (miles):** 8.33

**Direct route miles:** N/A (demand response)

**Fare:** \$1 one-way with subsidies for people who are elderly

**DRAFT Coordinated transit plan for NWI****Opportunity Enterprises**

Opportunity Enterprises (OE) is an agency that provides multiple services to adults with physical and developmental disabilities. These services are educational, vocational, recreational, and residential in nature. Additionally, OE provides demand-response transportation services in and around Porter County. Outside of Porter County, OE extends into Hobart Lake Station, Ogden Dunes, Michigan City, Westville, Wanatah, and LaCrosse.

**OE quick facts**

<b>FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):</b>	Sub-recipient
<b>Service type:</b>	Demand response
<b>Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):</b>	87,827
<b>Vehicle revenue miles:</b>	361,865
<b>Vehicle revenue hours:</b>	25,616
<b>Passengers per hour:</b>	3.43
<b>Passenger miles traveled:</b>	1,378,044
<b>Average trip length (miles):</b>	15.69
<b>Direct route miles:</b>	N/A (demand response)
<b>Fare:</b>	\$7.50 one-way in Porter County \$10 outside of Porter County

## V-Line

The V-Line is a service sponsored by the City of Valparaiso. The V-Line is a deviated fixed route service, meaning that while it operates on a scheduled route like a regular fixed-route service, riders may call ahead to request a deviation in the route up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. This service is provided throughout the City of Valparaiso, primarily along commercial corridors, with limited service connecting to the Dune Park South Shore Station.

### V-Line quick facts

**FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):** Sub-recipient

**Service type:** Fixed-route bus with deviations

**Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):** 121,675

**Vehicle revenue miles:** 203,401

**Vehicle revenue hours:** 15,136

**Passengers per hour:** 8.04

**Passenger miles traveled:** 522,452

**Average trip length (miles):** 4.29

**Direct route miles:** 60

**Fare:** \$1 with discounts available to students and people who are elderly.

## LaPorte County

### Michigan City Transit

Michigan City Transit (MCT) is a fixed route and paratransit operator in Michigan City. The service provides four distinct routes that begin and end at the Michigan City Library, offering service throughout the City. Currently, MCT is also operating the commuter service, the Transit Triangle. The Triangle offers service between Michigan City, LaPorte, and Purdue Northwest's campus in Westville. Buying a fare in Michigan City will also allow a rider to transfer for free to the Transit Triangle.

#### Michigan City Transit quick facts

**FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):** Direct Recipient

**Service type:** Fixed-route bus, Paratransit

**Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):** 166,086

**Vehicle revenue miles:** 238,782

**Vehicle revenue hours:** 16,680

**Passengers per hour:** 13.87

**Passenger miles traveled:** N/A (reduced reporter)

**Average trip length (miles):** N/A (reduced reporter)

**Direct route miles:** N/A (reduced reporter)

**Fare:** \$1 with discounts available based on age, disability status, and if the rider is a student

## Transit Triangle

The Transit Triangle is a new commuter service linking Michigan City, LaPorte, and Purdue Northwest's campus in Westville. The service is new and has had low ridership numbers in the first couple years of its operation, however recent efforts to streamline transfers between systems, lower fares, and a more efficient schedule are expected to boost ridership.

### Transit Triangle quick facts

**FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):** Sub-recipient (Michigan City Transit)

**Service type:** Commuter bus

**Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):** 6,846

**Vehicle revenue miles:** 94,655

**Vehicle revenue hours:** 4,282

**Passengers per hour:** 1.60

**Passenger miles traveled:** N/A (reduced reporter)

**Average trip length (miles):** N/A (reduced reporter)

**Direct route miles:** N/A (reduced reporter)

**Fare:** \$1.50 with discounts based on age, and for users that also have transit passes in Michigan City or La Porte

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**TransPorte**

TransPorte is a demand response operator sponsored by the City of La Porte. Unlike other demand response providers in Northwestern Indiana, TransPorte has the smallest geography meaning that while its service area is small it can provide faster more efficient service than the providers that cover a larger service area. TransPorte is also the first Northwestern Indiana transit operator to fully utilize low-emissions vehicles. The entire fleet of TransPorte’s revenue vehicles run on propane.

**TransPorte quick facts**

<b>FTA fund recipient type (direct/sub-recipient):</b>	Sub-recipient
<b>Service type:</b>	Demand response
<b>Unlinked passenger trips (annual ridership):</b>	40,683
<b>Vehicle revenue miles:</b>	121,577
<b>Vehicle revenue hours:</b>	13,051
<b>Passengers per hour:</b>	3.12
<b>Passenger miles traveled:</b>	N/A (reduced reporter)
<b>Average trip length (miles):</b>	N/A (reduced reporter)
<b>Direct route miles:</b>	N/A (demand response)
<b>Fare:</b>	\$3.25 with discounts depending on age

**Other rural providers**

In rural LaPorte County there is virtually no transit. Currently, there are only two operators that receive federal funding for transit, the Social Learning Institute and Paladin. The Social Learning Institute, uses federally-acquired buses for the clients of their institute only, taking occasional trips and other outings. Paladin has a similar transportation program, and is open to the public but with extremely limited capacity for all of LaPorte county. A new private taxi service has recently started providing service to rural LaPorte County residents.

“Ride With Care” primarily focuses their business on providing trips for the elderly and disabled, but are not currently offering subsidized services.

## Public participation

The Identification of service gaps and regional transit needs and priorities is an ongoing process that should not stop with this planning document and needs to be revisited on an ongoing basis. Communication and input was provided by many members of the public as well as several valued partner agencies, however it is understood that this list of partners and groups of stakeholders should grow into the future. Input was solicited using both formal and informal methods. Formal input was provided through the use of steering committees, working groups, surveys, and public meetings. Informal input was provided in field visits, interviews, and one-on-ones with regional and local advocates of various affiliated causes. Communication and input was received from:

- Assisted living facilities/residents
- Disability advocates and support organizations
- Educational institutions
- Housing assistance organizations
- Independent living support organizations
- Job placement centers/programs
- Local elected officials
- Local transit operators
- Medical care providers
- Mobility managers
- Non-profit organizations
- Public housing agencies
- Senior centers/participants
- Social service agencies
- Transit users



Outreach methods



- 131 letters mailed to groups with a focus on disability and advocacy and individuals with disabilities
- 115 Libraries, assisted-living centers, worker placement offices, government/public assistance centers, medical facilities, senior centers, veterans service centers, and United Way Offices

- 3 Public meetings in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties in transit accessible locations
- 33 Total participants from the public and human service agencies
- Meeting materials were available in English and Spanish
- Assisted-listening devices were available and requested
- CART services provided a live visual transcript of the meetings

- 1,200 Contacts emailed including transit operators, elected officials, transportation decision makers, human service agency contacts, and disability/independent living advocates
- 65 Human service agency contacts emailed asking for additional input

- 278 Survey responses from surveys available in print and online
- All surveys were available in English, Spanish, and braille

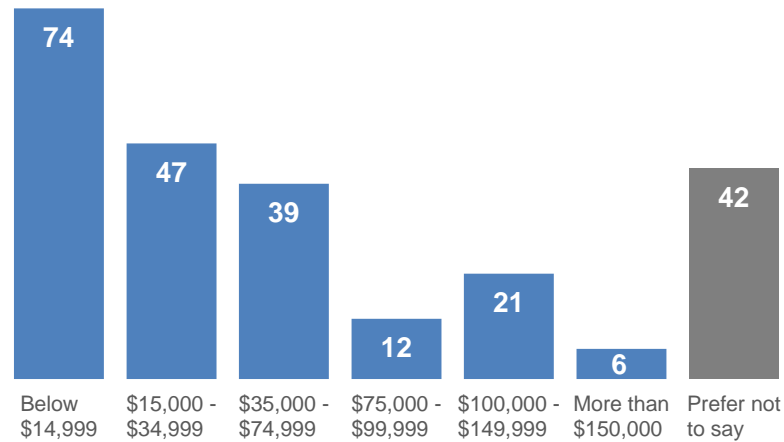
- 93 on-site visits to human service agencies
- 12 long-form organizational survey responses about professional transit coordination issues
- Regular meetings with the Coordinated Plan Steering Committee and the Transit Operators Roundtable

## Outreach trends

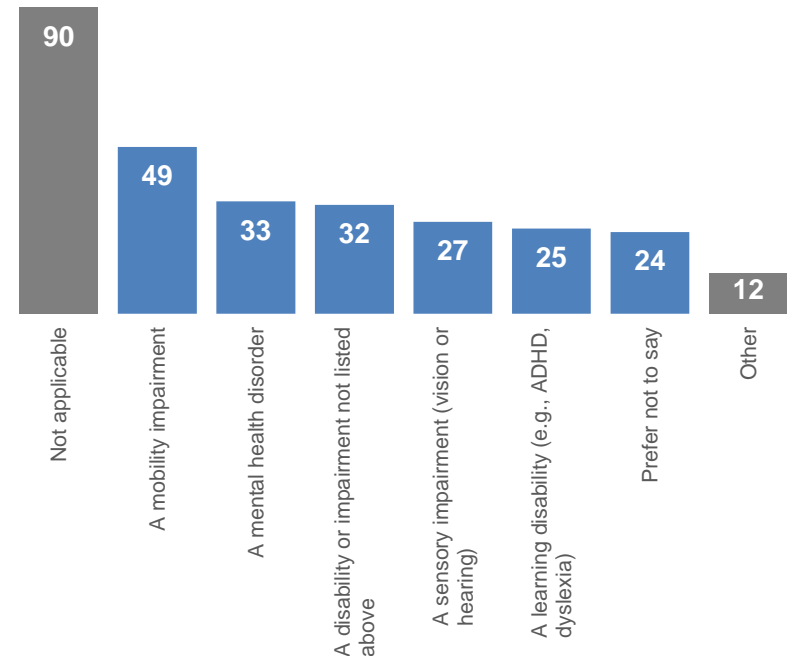
### General ridership survey

Of all the 278 individuals who took the survey, most people indicated they were white (53%), low-income (26% below \$15,000), approximately half of respondents were older than 55, and 58% indicated that someone in their household was diagnosed with a disability. Approximately 66% of all survey respondents indicated that they have used Northwestern Indiana's transit services – the most popular service the South Shore Train, but with strong representation from GPTC, East Chicago Transit, and the other transit operators.

#### What is your household annual income?



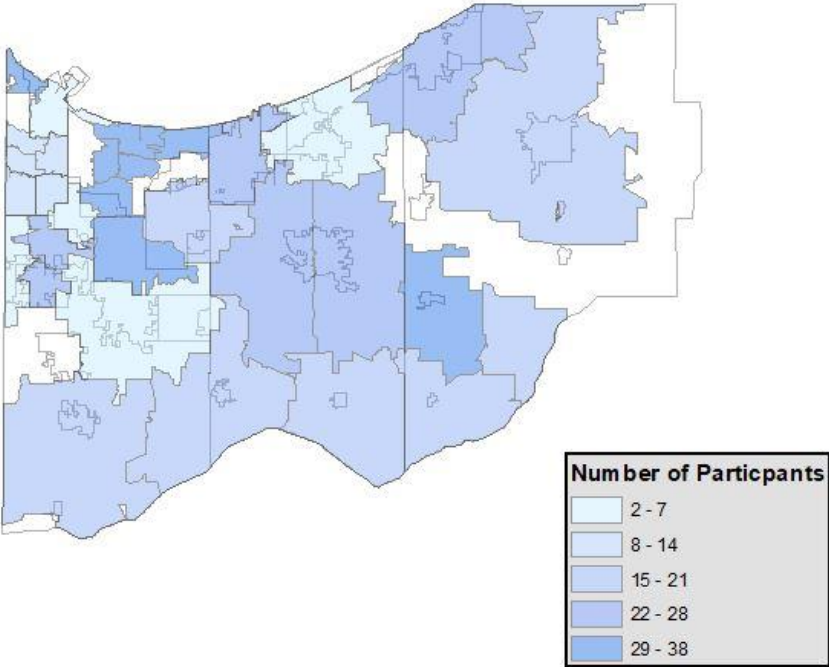
#### Have you or anyone in your household been diagnosed with a disability? (Select all that apply)



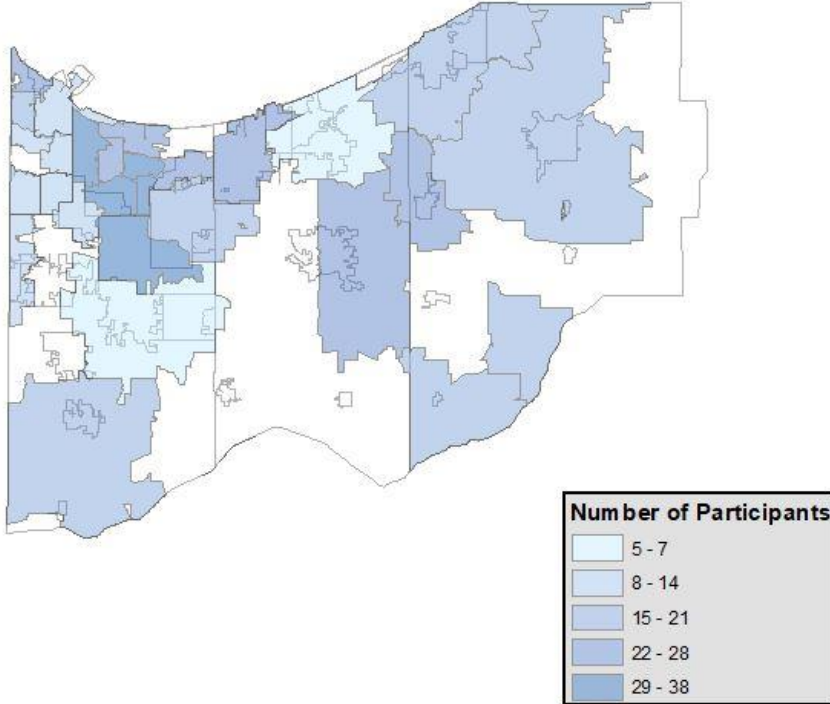
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Survey respondents were also asked to provide the zip codes for their home and work locations. Concentrations of respondents took the survey from North Lake County municipalities including, Gary, Whiting, and Merrillville; with other concentrations across the region. Participants who indicated they worked, were employed primarily in Gary, Griffith, Merrillville, and the East side of Valparaiso.

Survey Participant's Home Zip

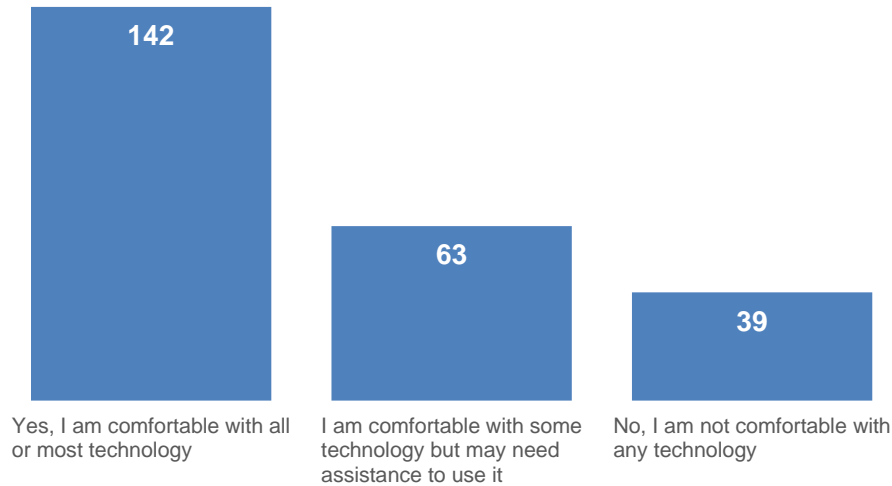


Survey Participant's Work Zip Code

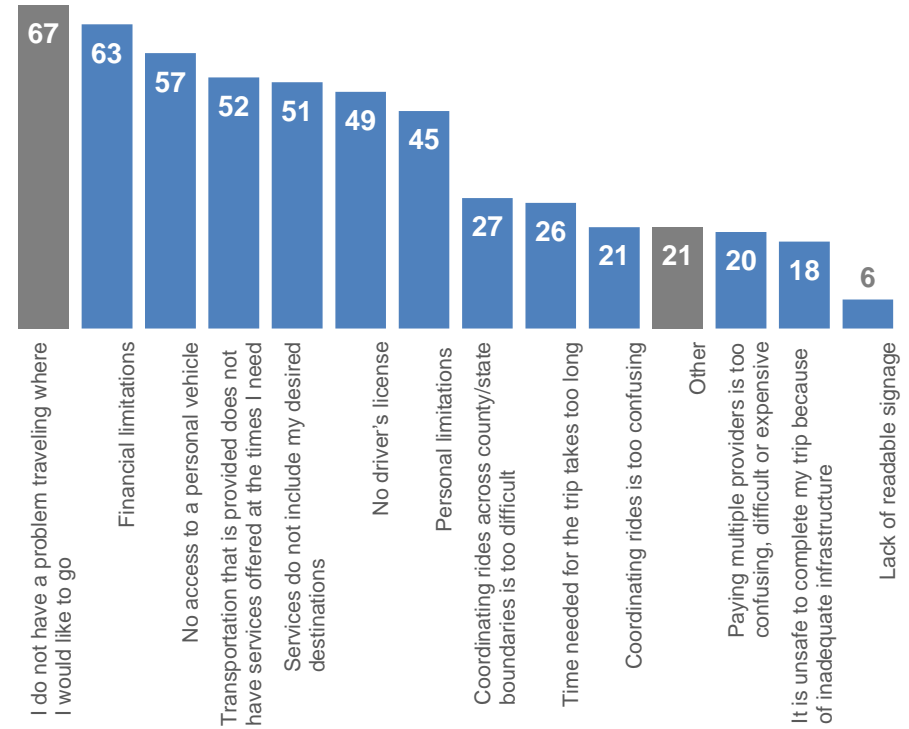


While most survey respondents indicated that their experience was overall or mostly positive (72%), many people indicated obstacles with transit that limited their access to where they wanted to go. If an individual does not have immediate access to a personal vehicle because of physical, financial, or other limitations; then crossing county lines becomes nearly impossible, or coordinating rides between providers to link trips is too confusing or expensive.

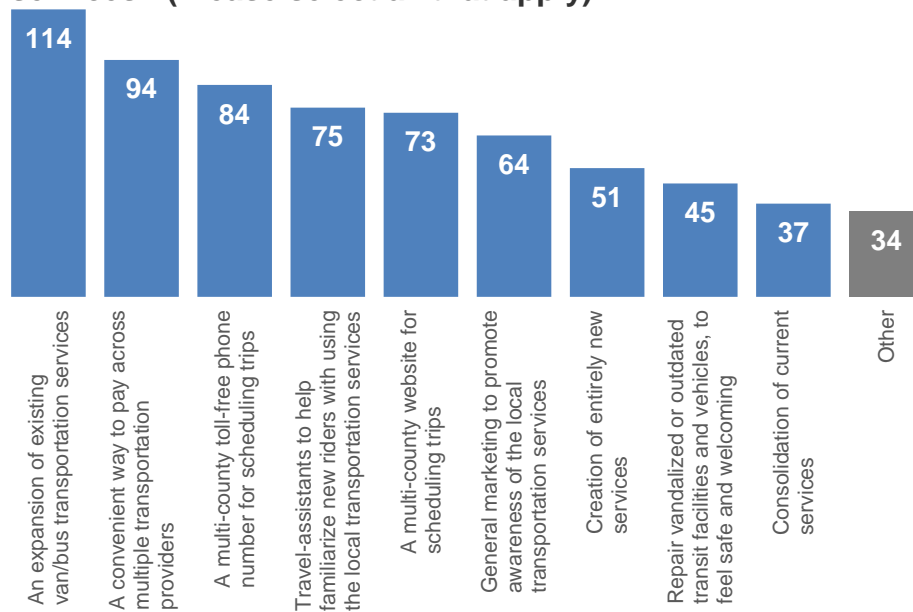
**Are you comfortable using technology (for example, a fax machine, smartphone, or computer) to learn about or schedule public transportation?**



**What are the biggest obstacles to where you would like to go? (Select all that apply.)**



**What improvement do you think would be of the greatest benefit to users of public transportation services? (Please select all that apply)**



**DRAFT Coordinated transit plan for NWI**

Other individuals who would like to use transit services, but do not, indicated that they cannot get to the locations they want or that simply finding out about existing services is too difficult. Another consistent theme throughout the various methods of outreach was that rides often require too much time to reserve in advance, and when the ride is eventually scheduled it takes too long to get to the destination.

In terms of transportation improvements, respondents were asked what times of day they need to travel. The following chart is a summary of their responses. Across the top of the chart are the days of the week, along the left-hand side are various three-hour timeslots across the day. Participants were asked to check the boxes that indicate when they needed transit services. The fields in green are the highest indicated, while the fields in red are the lowest. The value in each cell is the number of people who indicated that time and day of the week they typically needed to travel. It is no surprise that the most desired travel times are from Monday through Friday, from approximately 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, although many respondents also indicated the 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm timeslot as a priority. Relatively few people indicated they wanted late-night service, after 11:59 pm. However, a number of respondents indicated they need to travel on the weekends.

*Transit service time needs identified by survey respondents*

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
9am – 9am	37	82	76	83	79	78	52
9am – 12pm	44	71	65	70	65	70	57
12pm – 3pm	39	60	59	58	58	57	52
3pm – 6pm	41	67	64	67	66	64	50
6pm – 9pm	37	51	51	51	52	53	48
9pm – 12 am	25	28	28	28	28	32	35
12am- 3am	16	21	22	21	20	24	30
3am – 6am	15	18	20	20	20	22	24

Currently, all of the demand-response providers are in line with the times and days of desired service indicated by the survey. Of the demand response providers, a stand out provider that offers service during the extra 3:00 – 9:00 pm timeslot is Transporte, however

most other providers only offer service until 5:00 or 6:00 pm. Large portions of Lake County do not have consistent service after 3:00 pm.

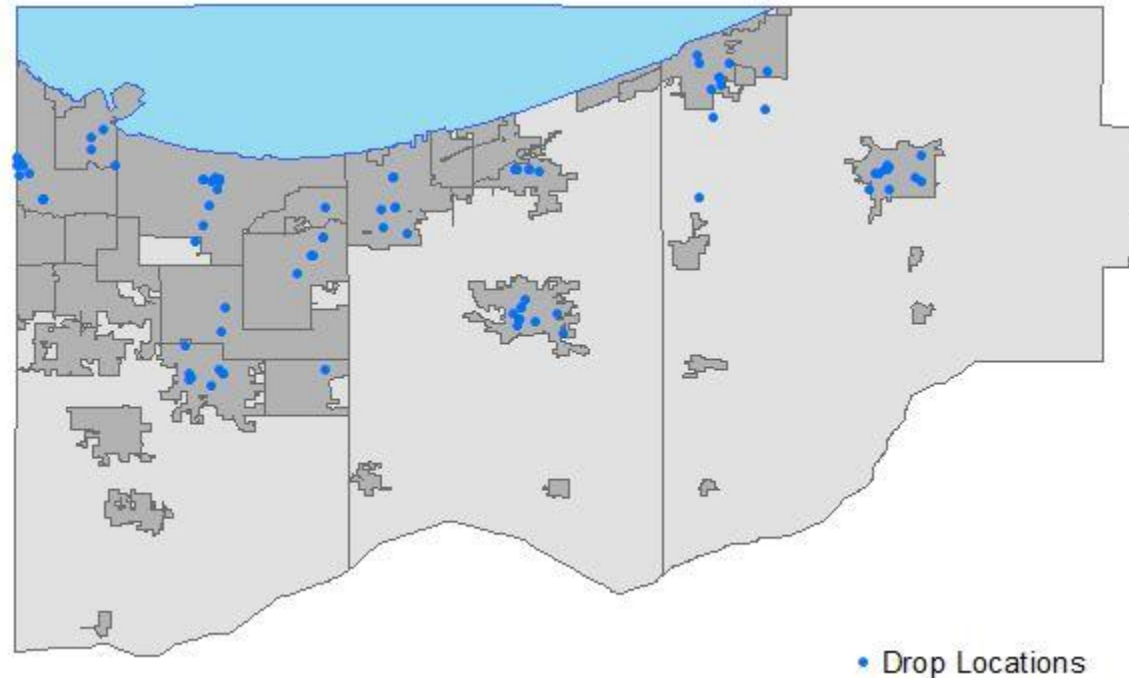
Overall, survey responders want an expansion of existing services (approximately 41%). Respondents also indicated that universal access passes, a multi-county dispatch network, educational transit-assistants, and the ability to schedule a ride from a multi-county network of from a website would all be a great benefit to transportation services. While many decision makers shy away from technological solutions for fear of alienating individuals who may be intimidated by technology, the majority of participants (73%) indicated they were comfortable with at least some technology.

### **Organizational survey**

In addition to the survey intended for the general public, NIRPC also released a survey designed to solicit feedback directly from professionals who work in the human services field. Unlike the general public survey, the organizational survey was long-form and encouraged professionals to comment on transit issues primarily related to arranging transportation on behalf of others. The responses from this survey primarily indicate that many human service agencies do not always have a comprehensive understanding of the transit options available to their clients. Information about systems outside of their immediate geography is limited, and like many of the general survey participants, coordinating rides across county lines is nearly impossible.

One area of particular interest was related to individuals who require dialysis treatment. Dialysis requires frequent, multi-week trips to and from dialysis centers. Social workers employed by dialysis centers are often responsible for arranging transportation for their patients, and find many obstacles in getting their patients to and from their facilities. Many dialysis patients often have other medical conditions that inhibit their ability to walk, or transport themselves to and from their treatment. Unless both the patient and the dialysis facility are both on a fixed route transit service with complementary paratransit, their only options are to use a demand-response provider or book service through the state Medicaid dispatcher, Southeastrans.

Demand-response providers can only provide “curb-to-curb” service, meaning a driver will not enter a patient’s home to assist the patient in getting into the vehicle. Additionally, if the patient requires a medical assistant or family member to travel with them, demand

**DRAFT** Coordinated transit plan for NWI*On-site visits and paper survey drop locations*

response providers are obligated to charge the assistant with a fare. This can quickly become too difficult or costly for riders with advanced medical conditions. Southeastrans was frequently cited as a difficult service to coordinate with. Many regional operators indicated that coordinating with Southeastrans was too difficult, too expensive, or too inefficient to continue to take Medicaid trips.

Currently, only two public transit providers, continue to work with Southeastrans, Paladin and Opportunity Enterprises. For other human-service professionals, Southeastrans was indicated as not dependable and inflexible. That patients were frequently late in dropping off patients or picking them up. Dispatchers are slow to respond to ride requests, and often have a poor attitude. Unfortunately, for an individual that requires frequent medical transportation and is low-income, the state Medicaid dispatcher is the only service option they can utilize to maintain their health.



## **Public meetings**

The public meetings had a lot of variation in their feedback depending on location. For instance, the public meeting in Gary focused a lot of discussion on issues with fixed route transit from GPTC and the South Shore Train, and public meetings in less urban areas like Valparaiso, focused on increasing access to unincorporated communities and demand response needs.

A common thread throughout the public meeting process was communication about transit issues. Participants indicated that traditional methods used for communicating issues about transit or coordination are often ineffective. More effort should be given in providing information about the meetings further in advance than what is typical for other public meetings. Additionally, public meetings are not necessarily the best way to allow transit riders to participate in future planning efforts.

Individuals that rely on transit for 100% of their travel often have limited availability for making another trip to attend a meeting - even if the meeting is held after typical working hours in a transit accessible location. Participants indicated that utilizing social media, and other online resources to not only advertise the meeting, but to livestream meetings where participants can weigh in online. Data resources can also be more accessible, so that the general ridership of a service can find out more about statistics on the transit system, schedules, policies, instant messages about service changes and schedules, and other relevant policies and figures.

Most importantly, public participation should be solicited where people are: in transit facilities, on transit vehicles, in public housing, and other places associated with affected population groups. These considerations should all be made while recognizing that older residents may not have the same level of comfortability with technology.

Participants in the public meetings also put emphasis on the fact that transit does not begin and end on a vehicle. Infrastructure connections to transit facilities are an essential part of the network. Sidewalks, trails, bus stops are essential, especially to persons with disabilities. Where an individual without a physical disability may be able to traverse a broken-up sidewalk, or quickly leave a bus stop that does not feel safe; individuals with mobile impairments do not have the same freedoms.



Additionally, transit operators and municipal decision makers should consider additional accessibility features when planning pedestrian infrastructure. Likewise, NIRPC and Northwestern Indiana’s federal and state partners should allocate more funding to making pedestrian infrastructure more accessible, utilizing universal design standards. Participants mentioned specifically funding for additional curb cuts, sidewalk repair, pedestrian crossing buttons that do not require a push-button, audio and visual crossing assistance, automated stop announcements for the visually impaired, enhanced access for persons with disabilities on the South Shore Train, additional lighting at station stops, and funding to prioritize and implement local ADA transition plans.

Similarly to the other outreach methods, the public meetings also indicated that connections between transit systems is lacking. Even in North Lake County where many transit operations overlap geographically, coordination from one service to another is difficult. Meeting participants indicated they need more coordination between local fixed route operators and the South Shore Train schedule, so less time is spent waiting at a train station, after already waiting for a bus. The Chicago suburb transit service, Pace bus, makes some stops in Lake County, but connections to the service are few. Likewise, commuter services such as Valparaiso’s ChicaGo Dash, pass through North Lake County, but do not stop, and connections between demand response providers are difficult to coordinate. Even though there are many transit options in North Lake County, the fare policies between each system are inconsistent and linking trips together can be difficult and expensive.

*The Pace bus service is the primary transit operator servicing the suburbs surrounding Chicago. The Pace network provides a variety of transit services to connect the suburbs of Chicago to each other as well as the city itself.*



*Rural transit providers like the Social Learning Institute and Paladin, do not apply for transit funding through MPOs. Their federal funding is allocated from the State of Indiana. Neither the Social Learning Institute or Paladin are NIRPC subrecipients, and have much smaller operations by comparison. However, these organizations may use this plan to assist in their ongoing mission, and securing funding.*



Rural communities also have poor connections between transit systems. In most of South Lake County there is only one transit provider. In Porter County there are there are two operators, and in LaPorte County rural communities there is virtually no transit. Currently, there are only two operators that receive federal funding for transit, the Social Learning Institute and Paladin. The Social Learning Institute, uses federally-acquired vehicles for the clients of their institute only, taking occasional trips and other outings. Paladin has a similar transportation program, and is open to the public but with extremely limited capacity for all of LaPorte county. Paladin frequently runs into the same problems with Medicaid billing and Southeastrans as was mentioned previously. While demand-response transit is valuable, especially for individuals with disabilities and people who are elderly, it is limited in its ability to cross county lines, and can be inflexible.

Urban communities with established fixed route stations indicated that the maintenance of vehicles and passenger facilities is often lacking. Even when brand new bus stops are installed, it does not take long for the stops to become defaced, vandalized, or simply fall out of repair. More consideration should be given to regular maintenance of these assets in addition to securing new facilities. A poorly maintained bus stop provides the assumption of a facility being unsafe, even if it truly is not so. Safety and the perception of safety is very important for continued use of transit in the region.

Across all three public meetings, individuals recognized the need for services that are more efficient during more times of day. Riders want to be on the bus for less time, and want service into the evenings and over the weekends. Access to public housing; medical facilities; essential services for people who are elderly, disabled, or low income should be prioritized while also recognizing that all people should have access locations that enhance all aspects of their lives – not just essential services. Operators and human service professionals cannot lose sight of the fact that while access to these places is a priority, it does not complete an individual's transportation needs. Likewise, every public meeting emphasized the importance of connecting vulnerable populations: people who are elderly, people who live in disadvantaged communities, people who live in public housing, people who are veterans, and people who have disabilities.

At every public meeting concern was raised about transit funding. Every community wants more access to more federal funds to expand existing transit services. Additionally, the need for local match continues to be an issue for nearly every transit provider in the region. In order to leverage more federal funding, local funds have to be raised to match the federal funds on a 50/50 or 80/20 ratio. The lack of a dedicated regional local funding source has continued to stunt the growth of cohesive regional transit network.

Additionally, nearly every operator is feeling the demand for transit increase as more and more medical facilities are built on the urban periphery. Hospitals, dialysis centers, medical facilities, service centers, shopping centers, and other critical institutions are often built outside of the urban environment, where populations are the densest and into sprawling suburban and rural locations. This development pattern means longer trips for fixed route and demand response providers, longer wait times, and more deadhead time. Coordination between transit and human service agencies mean coordinating early, at the physical

planning level. Gaps in transit service because a medical facility or other critical service moved outside of a transit service area, should be filled with the assistance from human service provider.

**Data trends**

Most of Northwestern Indiana’s population lives within some kind of transit service area. Nearly all of Lake and Porter Counties are covered by a fixed route or demand response provider. LaPorte County’s two largest population centers are covered by transit, but leave most of the county’s land area unlinked to the rest of the system except by very limited rural providers. The table on the next page indicates the amount of people in the region who are elderly, who have a disability, and who are low-income that are currently serviced by a transit provider.

*Status of transit service access by various populations*

	Elderly (65+)		Individuals with a Disability		Low-income		Total	
<b>Within Total Service Area</b>	99,293	89%	92,270	93%	120,822	94%	716,687	93%
<b>Outside of Total Service Area</b>	11,881	11%	7,169	7%	7,538	6%	51,020	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>111,174</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>99,439</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>128,360</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>767,707</b>	<b>100%</b>

As indicated, 93% of Northwestern Indiana’s total population is within a transit service area, including 89% of all people in the region who are elderly, 93% of people who have a disability within the region, and 94% of individuals who are low-income. At first glance, this information appears to indicate that most residents are well-connected by transit. However, a deeper understanding of the type of transit that is available would indicate that simply is not true.

*Status of transit service types by various populations*

	Elderly (65+)		Individuals with a Disability		Low-income		Total	
<b>Fixed Route with complementary paratransit</b>	35,761	32%	40,183	40%	58,173	45%	274,325	36%
<b>Demand Response</b>	86,064	77%	78,118	79%	100,931	79%	628,352	82%
<b>Deviated Fixed Route</b>	5,511	5%	3,601	4%	5,729	4%	42,384	6%
<b>Commuter Bus</b>	5,740	5%	4,586	5%	9,322	7%	42,138	5%
<b>Commuter Rail</b>	13,222	12%	15,026	15%	23,061	18%	103,538	13%

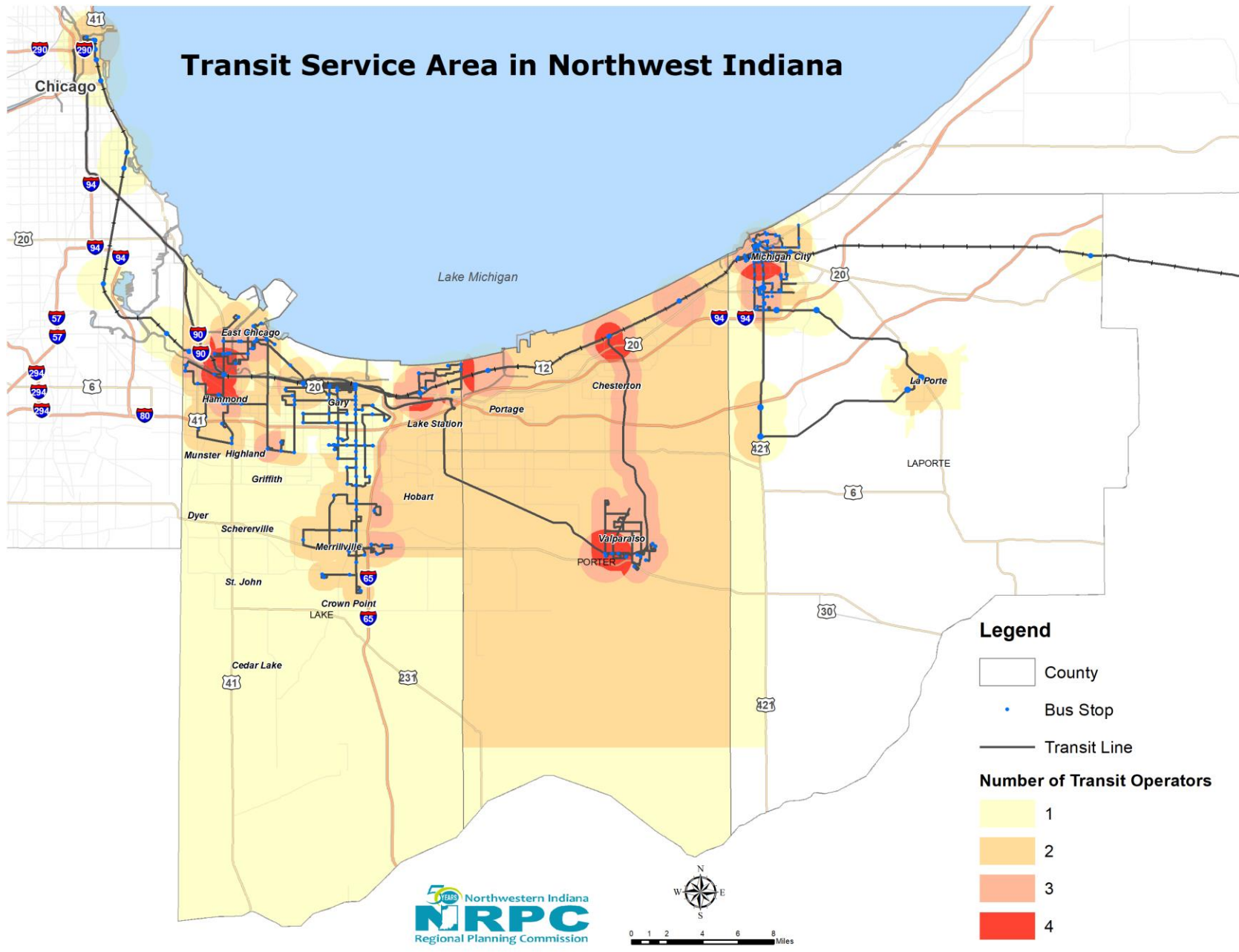
When the transit network is divided into service type, some of the obstacles facing region residents begin to take shape. As indicated earlier, fixed route services with complementary paratransit, offers more freedom to individuals who rely on transit than demand response alone. However, only 36% of the region is within a fixed route service area with complementary paratransit. While the majority of region residents are within the service area of demand response providers, approximately 82%, demand response cannot offer the same level of freedom and access as paratransit providers can. This is not intended to undersell the importance of demand response transit. These operators provide valuable services to individuals who would be otherwise isolated, however demand response providers can only offer limited rides, at limited times of day, and often must be scheduled several days in advance. This provides very little to the user in terms of access to everyday employment, or flexibility, and spontaneity in their everyday lives.

Unfortunately, the limitations of the transit network are also clear when considering the time of day that service is available. Wide coverage of transit over a geographic area has limited impact when the hours of service are constricted. The following table indicates the current availability of service depending on time of day. With only some exceptions, most demand response providers offer service until 5pm. Porter County Aging and Community Services offer service until 6pm, and TransPorte offers service until 9pm. South Lake County Community Services core hours are between 9am and 3pm with some limited flexibility to pick up before and after.

*Status of transit service hours*

Service Type	Operator	Times Service is Available	Hours Service is Available
Demand response:	North Township	7:00am – 5:00pm	10
	Opportunity Enterprises	7:00am – 5:00pm	10
	PCACS	6:00am – 6:00pm	12
	SLCCS	9:00am – 3:00pm	6
	TransPorte	6:00am – 9:00pm	15
Fixed, deviated, and commuter:	East Chicago	5:55am - 8:40pm	16
	GPTC	5:30am - 9:00pm	15.5
	Dash	5:50am - 7:15am	11.25
	Michigan City Transit	6:30am - 6:00pm	12.5
	Transit Triangle	6:00am - 5:30pm	11.5
	V-Line	6:16am - 10:19pm	16.25

In terms of overall access to transit services, most of the region only has access to one or two operators. However, concentrations of transit operations are present in certain parts of the region, where up to four operators all have a service overlap. These communities include parts of Hammond, Lake Station, Portage, Chesteron, and Michigan City.

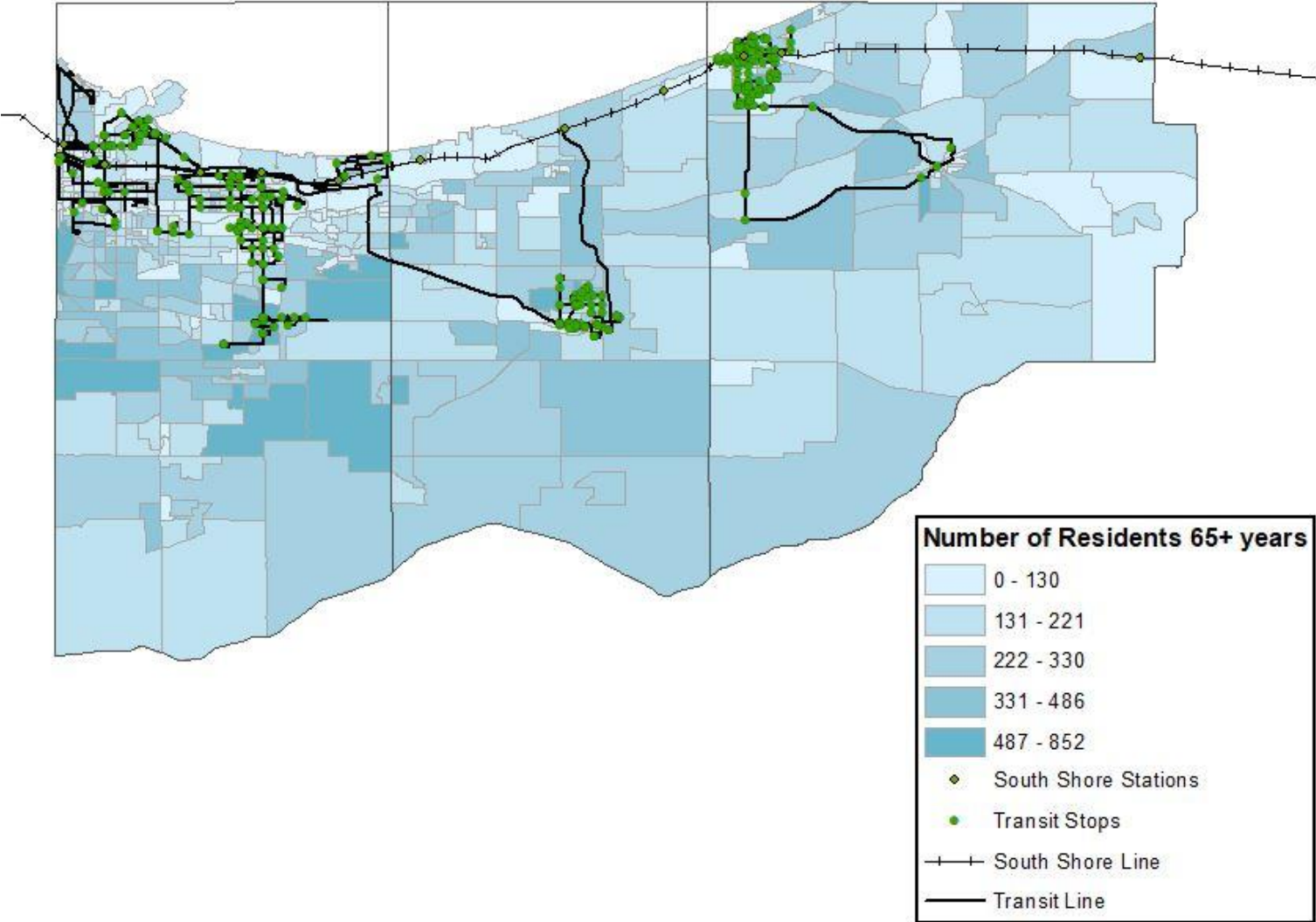




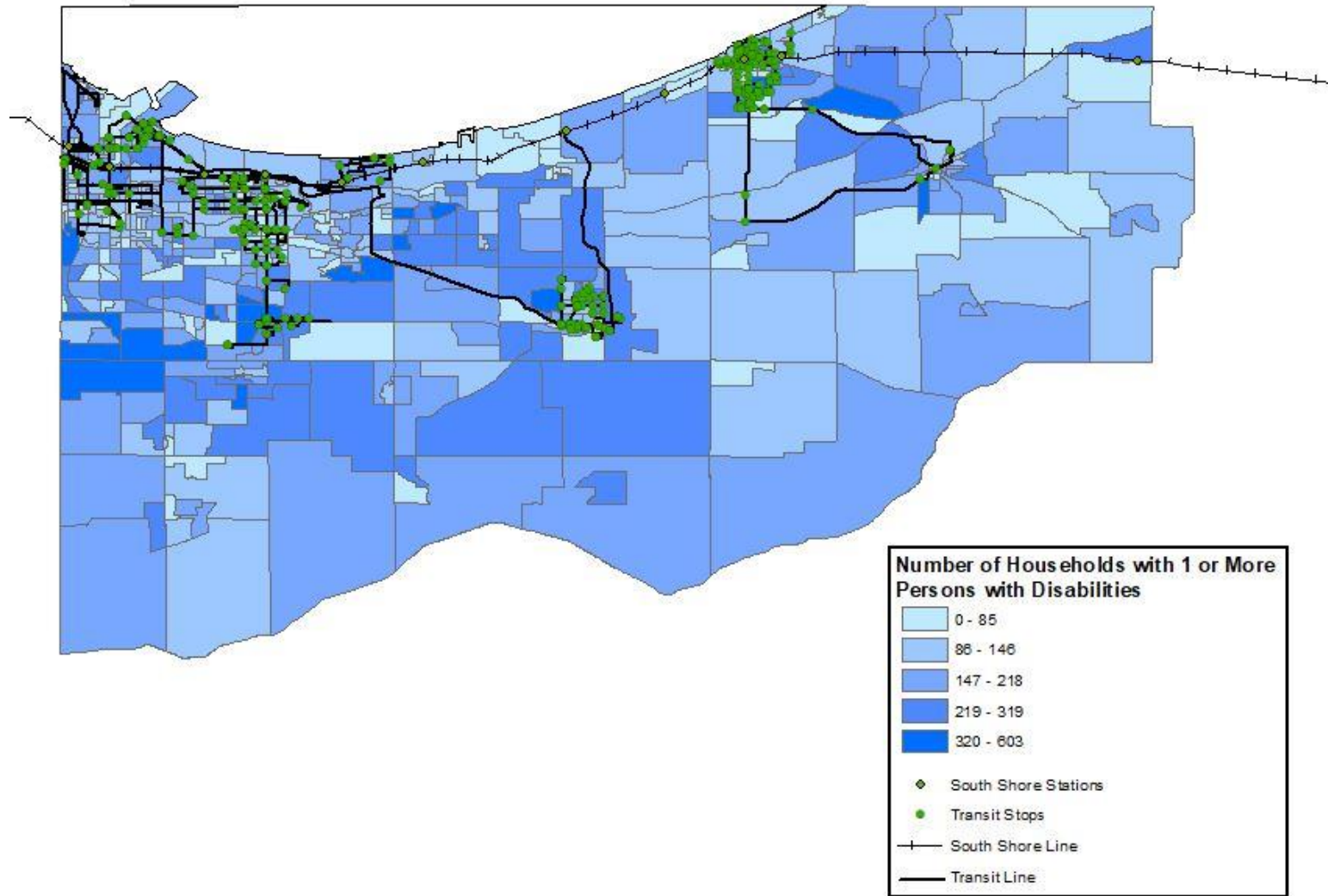
**DRAFT** Coordinated transit plan for NWI

In terms of other access, as mentioned previously, certain populations in Northwestern Indiana are more likely to rely on transit, and their connections to the transit network are of paramount importance. These populations include individuals who are elderly (below), have a disability (page 37), live in a disadvantaged area (page 36), or have limited access to food (page 39).

*Transit access for NWI elderly population*

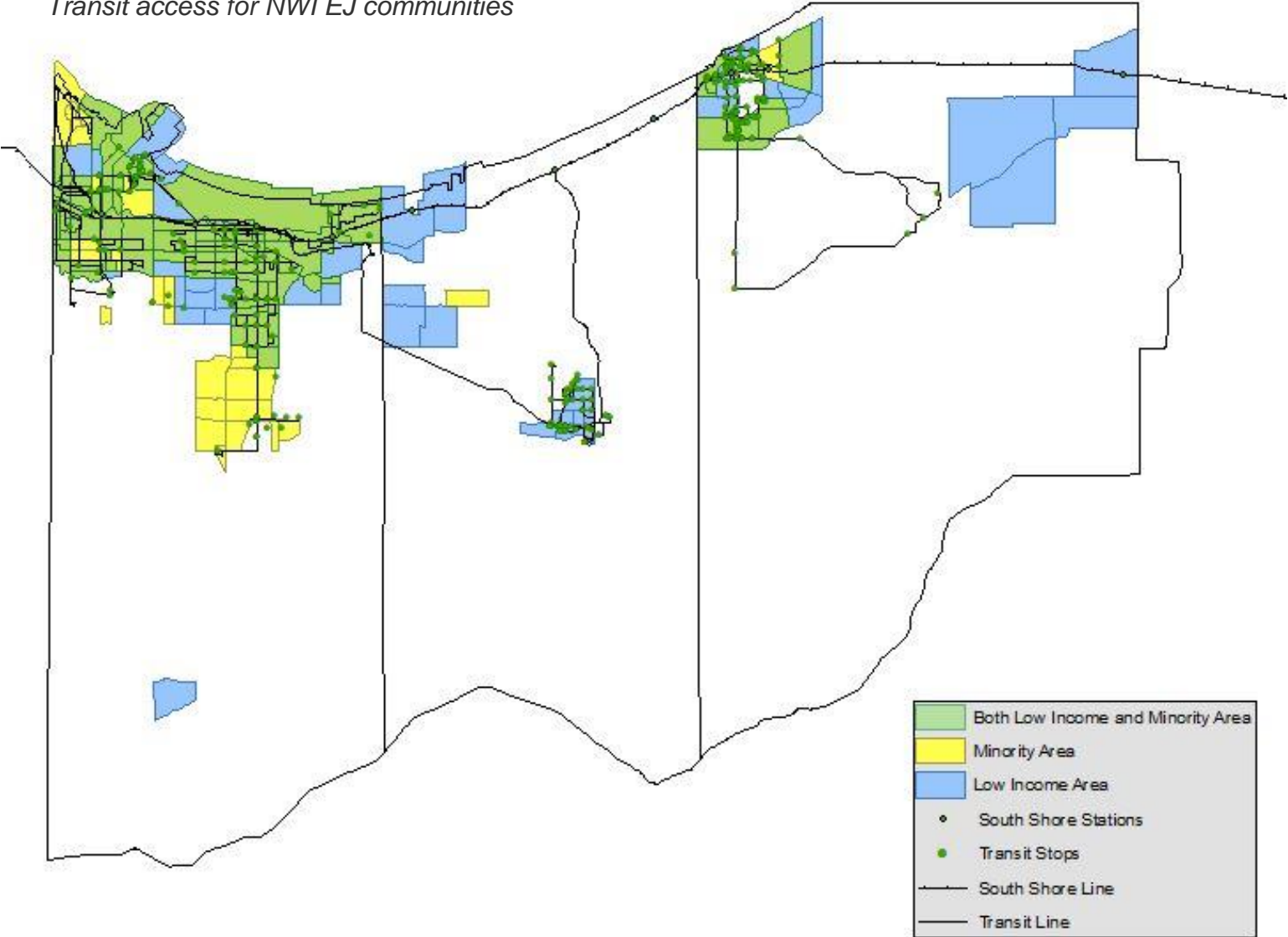


*Transit access for NWI population with disabilities*



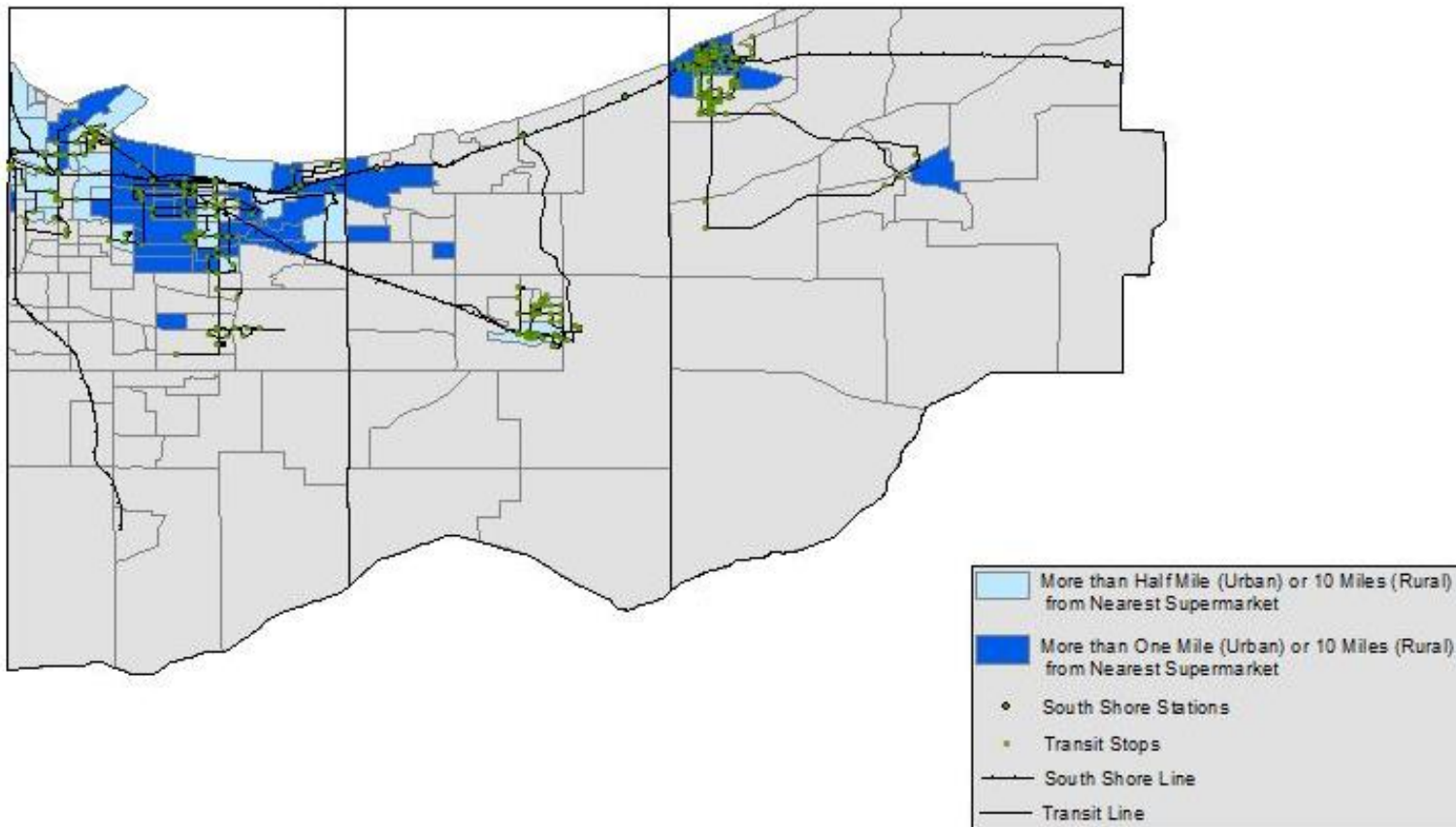


Transit access for NWI EJ communities



Because of Northwestern Indiana's growth pattern, it is becoming more and more difficult to keep disadvantaged populations connected. When looking at individuals who are elderly, frequently assisted living facilities or nursing homes are often built in the suburban space outside of dense urban communities. As indicated on the map, "Transit access for NWI elderly population" and "Population with disabilities," the highest concentrations of individuals who are elderly and individuals with disabilities are outside of the core service area for transit providers. Developers and human service agencies will build large-scale housing projects for these residents, and when tenants begin to occupy the space, request transit services for their clients. This puts a lot of pressure on the transit network. For

*Transit access in NWI food deserts*



demand response providers it means more time between trips and more travel time for riders. For demand response it means more revenue miles and longer trips as well.

In communities like Valparaiso, an overlap of transit services does not mean duplicating service. In instances like this, demand response providers take a role in moving individuals to and from municipalities, while the local demand response service connects them to the inner-city trips that they need during their stay. By adding fixed route service in communities that are dense enough to accommodate fixed route, it alleviates the need for demand response providers and allows the entire system to function more efficiently. However, continuing to build outside of the urban core undermines efficiency.

Northwestern Indiana is not without its shortage of disadvantaged areas. NIRPC uses federal guidelines to define these areas as “Environmental Justice” (EJ) areas. EJ areas are communities where there is a large concentration of people who are an ethnic minority, people who are low-income, or both. Historically, these communities have been left out of the conversation concerning transportation investments. NIRPC and the federal government use metrics surrounding EJ areas to ensure that new transportation investments do not disproportionately burden these communities.

In terms of transit access, to EJ communities, most EJ communities are connected to the network. The fixed route services in Lake County, run throughout the EJ communities. However, the connections from these communities into areas of opportunity, job centers and other key locations is lacking. Additionally, low-income areas in South Lake County, North Porter County, and East La Porte County are not connected at all. These communities solely rely on demand response transit, which has limitations.

Lastly, large portions of Northwestern Indiana have limited access to grocery stores. The map on page 39 indicates how transit operators provide access to areas that are designated as a “food desert.” Similarly, to the EJ communities; fixed route providers travel in, out and through food deserts; and demand response providers have a blanket service area that overlaps with food deserts; however individual connections to grocery stores and other sources of fresh produce are unclear. Some transit operators, like GPTC are actively working to bring fresh food to transit riders. GPTC hosts a farmer’s market at some of its station stops so riders can peruse fresh goods while waiting for a ride. Strategies like this, as well as other connections to food should be considered when planning transit.

## Service gaps and regional needs

### Service gaps

- Evening service
- Weekend service
- Rural LaPorte County
- Access between transit operators
- Access between municipalities and counties
- Accessible pedestrian infrastructure to allow for safe access to transit

### Regional needs

- More local investment in regional transit
- More flexible service to more times of day
- A density threshold to prioritize either fixed route or demand response service
- Increased service across county and municipal boundaries
- Increased coordination to more efficiently link service across transit operators
- Expansion of paratransit services
- More pedestrian connections
- Enhanced communication about transit issues to the public
- Consistent language and terminology in operator schedules and websites
- Better coordination between regional transit providers and Southeastrans
- Increase the accessibility of public meetings, meeting materials, and other important communications
- Easier opportunities for the public to arrange transportation
- Easier opportunities for the public to coordinate between transit operators
- More access to fresh quality food
- More connections to priority populations, such as:
  - People living in environmental justice communities
  - People living in food deserts
  - People who are elderly
  - People who are low-income
  - People who are disabled



*The long-range transportation plan is a federal requirement for all MPOs. All long-range transportation plans are required to have a 20-year planning horizon to serve as the foundation for other transportation programming. Most long-range transportation plans have a 20-year planning horizon, but NIRPC's 2050 Plan has a 30-year horizon to better integrate with Chicago's "On To 2050" plan.*

*The 3C transportation planning process states: planning must be maintained as an ongoing activity and should address both short-term needs and long-term vision; the process must involve a wide variety of interested parties; and the process must cover all aspects and be consistent with regional and local plans.*

- People who are veterans
- Increased service to critical locations, including:
  - Medical facilities, including dialysis centers
  - Service providers/Human service organizations
  - Educational institutions
  - Grocery stores
  - Recreational areas
  - Shopping districts

## Strategies to coordinate transit

Concurrent to the development of this document, NIRPC is developing its long-range planning document, the [NWI 2050 Plan](#). NIRPC, in collaboration with the public, has developed four vision statements and four plan focus areas. Each vision statement captures an idealized future that Northwestern Indiana residents want to see realized by the year 2050. Each vision statement is linked to the plan focus areas. By combining these two ideas NIRPC developed a series of "critical paths." The critical paths were preliminarily endorsed in July 2018 and will guide NIRPC future investments and planning.

Some critical paths are more closely related to coordinated transit planning than others. On page 43 is the matrix detailing the strong direct relationships between the critical paths and coordinated transit planning in dark green. The light green critical paths indicate an indirect relationship. The critical paths not highlighted indicate no relationship. Strategies for improving and coordinating transit are provided using the direct and indirectly linked critical paths.

The strategies identified on pages 43-51 will require active and robust partnerships throughout our region including the transit operators, local governments, counties, non-profits, human service providers, advocates and more. No single actor or agency can accomplish all that is suggested or needed. All future activities must be continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive as required by federal metropolitan planning regulations under the ["3C planning process."](#)

*NWI 2050 Plan visions, plan focus areas, and critical paths*

	<b>Connected NWI /</b> <i>NWI's people have accessible, safe, and equal opportunities for working, playing, living, and learning.</i>	<b>Renewed NWI /</b> <i>NWI's urban and rural centers are places people want to come to and live in, and our environment is safe and healthy.</i>	<b>United NWI / NWI's</b> <i>diversity is celebrated, and we work together as a community across racial, ethnic, political and cultural lines for the mutual benefit of the region.</i>	<b>Vibrant NWI / NWI's</b> <i>economy is thriving, our people are well educated, growth is planned, and natural and agricultural areas are valued and protected.</i>
<b>Economy + place /</b> <i>Focusing on NWI's economy and quality of place</i>	Update land development policies and strategies to emphasize accessibility between people and opportunities.	Maximize growth in existing centers to enhance civic and economic life and to protect natural areas and farmland.	Collaborate regionally to welcome a diversity of people and talent to achieve mixed and balanced growth.	Promote initiatives and policies to ensure healthy living, sustainability, quality of life, and prosperity.
<b>Environment /</b> <i>Focusing on NWI's environmental quality</i>	Connect fragmented natural areas and integrate links between people and green spaces to increase resiliency and health outcomes.	Clean and protect the air, land, water, and natural habitats to sustain and enhance the environment's safety and health for all.	Build region-wide coalitions to advance environmental sustainability for the benefit of future generations.	Endorse innovative energy and environmental strategies to achieve a balance that protects diverse and unique ecological treasures while fostering a sustainable economy.
<b>Mobility /</b> <i>Focusing on NWI's transportation choices</i>	Complete roadway, bicycle, sidewalk, and transit networks across municipal and county lines to enhance safe and efficient access to opportunities for all.	Improve roadway, bicycle, sidewalk, and transit networks to revitalize existing urban and rural centers and enhance equity.	Prioritize transformative investments to elevate the position of the region and to attract a diversity of residents and high-quality economic opportunities.	Adopt technological innovation that enhances the safe and fluid movement of people and goods to enable a flourishing economy.
<b>People + leaders /</b> <i>Focusing on NWI's people and community leaders</i>	Commit to removing barriers and obstacles to guarantee equal and accessible opportunities.	Focus educational and workforce development initiatives on expanding skills that the modern economy requires.	Foster better communications, cooperation and coordinate to bring people together across the lines that divide us.	Embrace a dynamic, diversified and sustainable economy that attracts and retains talent, enhances quality of life, and increases personal and household income.



## Connected NWI

### **Economy + place: update land development policies and strategies to emphasize accessibility between people and opportunities.**

- Encourage compliance and execution of locally-developed ADA transition plans
- Allocate funding to allow more resources to implement locally-developed ADA transition plans
- Build sidewalk and trail connections throughout residential areas and into downtowns, job centers, and transit networks
- Use universal design standards when developing new pedestrian infrastructure
- Use universal design standards when developing new transit infrastructure like bus stops and signage
- Keep transit and pedestrian infrastructure well-maintained and well lit
- Encourage human service and medical agencies that move outside of the urban core to contribute to local match if they want to continue to use transit services

### **Environment: connect fragmented natural areas and integrate links between people and green spaces to increase resiliency and health outcomes.**

- Prioritize linking individuals with parks, beaches, and other outdoor green spaces and recreational facilities

### **Mobility: complete roadway, bicycle, sidewalk, and transit networks across municipal and county lines to enhance safe and efficient access to opportunities for all.**

- Encourage and prioritize transit expansions that cross municipal and county lines
- Encourage coordination between operators to link across county and municipal lines where possible, including designated pick up and drop off points between providers, dispatch sharing, and other strategies

### **People and leaders: commit to removing barriers and obstacles to guarantee equal and accessible opportunities.**

- Continue to encourage and prioritize funding for projects that eliminate barriers to safe accessible transit, including projects that improve and go beyond ADA compliance

## Renewed NWI

### **Economy and place: maximize growth in existing centers to enhance civic and economic life and to protect natural areas and farmland.**

- Continue to encourage density
- Prioritize fixed-route service with complementary paratransit in areas with enough density to accommodate the service
- Prioritize demand-response service in areas that lack the density to support fixed-route with complementary paratransit

### **Mobility: improve roadway, bicycle, sidewalk, and transit networks to revitalize existing urban and rural centers and enhance equity.**

A transit system that truly enhances equity needs to allow the same freedom of movement as the population in Northwestern Indiana that exclusively drives.

- Prioritize transit expansions that can allow a typical work day, with some flexibility (6am – 9pm)
- Prioritize transit expansions that decrease wait times
- Prioritize transit expansions that add availability during the weekends
- Prioritize transit expansions that increase flexible use of restaurants, shopping centers, movie theaters, and other recreational amenities

### **People + leaders: focus educational and workforce development initiatives on expanding skills that the modern economy requires.**

- Prioritize transit expansions to job centers
- Encourage employers to consider transit as a viable method to get their employees to work
- Encourage employers to offer flexible shift start times to allow more flexibility for transit users
- Encourage employers to contribute to local share to expand transit to job centers
- Work with educational institutions to use existing public transit operators to offer campus transportation services instead of paying for the service themselves
- Encourage educational institutions to purchase universal access passes for their students as an incentive to use transit



## United NWI

### **Economy and place: collaborate regionally to welcome a diversity of people and talent to achieve mixed and balanced growth.**

- Prioritize transit investments that connect communities in environmental justice areas, people who are elderly, people who are low-income, people with disabilities, and veterans.
- Prioritize transit expansions that better connect the determined at-risk populations to job centers, medical facilities, recreation centers, shopping districts, and educational institutions.
- Prioritize transit expansions that close the gap between at-risk populations and fresh food resources
- Prioritize transit expansions that connect at-risk populations to regional decision makers

### **Mobility: prioritize transformative investments to elevate the position of the region and to attract a diversity of residents and high-quality economic opportunities.**

- Support regional transformative investments like the South Shore's West Lake expansion and Double Tracking Projects; GPTC's Broadway Rapid Express; and Valparaiso's transit-oriented development
- Prioritize connections to existing and future transformative transit investments in the region

### **People and leaders: foster better communications, cooperation and coordination to bring people together across the lines that divide us.**

- Develop a regional transit website, featuring:
  - Up-to date figures of all transit operations in Northwestern Indiana
  - Links to transit operator websites and other information resources
  - Downloadable and printable maps and schedules
  - An address-lookup feature where users can determine what transit operators are near them
  - A streamlined comment box where a user can send comments about transit services to the operator as well as regional decision makers and compliance officers

- Instructions on how to use transit services
- Instructions on how to attend and participate in transit operator public meetings, as well as other public meetings concerning transit
- Digital methods for requesting rides from demand response providers, including email or text
- Create consistent policies and language for using transit including:
  - Policies regarding eligibility for paratransit services and reciprocity
  - Fare policies
  - Information about transit services such as start and stop time, scheduling methods, procedures, no-show policies, and others
- Use enhanced communication techniques outlined in this plan to inform human service agencies, medical professionals, and decision makers about all options an individual has when choosing transit
- Use regional platforms to promote public participation in transit operator board meetings and other transit related public meetings
- Continue to expand outreach methods to find better, more meaningful, communication methods outside of what is strictly required by FTA
- Develop cost-saving measures between transit operators, such as consolidation of services, vehicle sharing, shared services, shared staff, joint events, and training opportunities
- Develop cost-saving measures between transit operators and human-resource agencies such as multi-user pick up and drop off times, coordinated services between many clients, distribution of information about transit, and others
- Develop a multi-county website and phone number for scheduling trips across providers
- Utilize travel-assistants to help familiarize riders with transportation services
- Offer transit trainings to educate the public on what transit is available and how to use it with multiple operators represented

## Vibrant NWI

### **Economy and place: promote initiatives and policies to ensure healthy living, sustainability, quality of life, and prosperity.**

- Link transit operators to human service agencies to find more efficient ways of using transit to link individuals to health resources

### **Mobility: adopt technological innovation that enhances the safe and fluid movement of people and goods to enable a flourishing economy.**

- Prioritize funding for technological improvements that can allow for coordination between transit operators
- Prioritize funding for technological improvements that have robust data-tracking software to be used in transit decision-making
- Prioritize funding for technological improvements that allow for greater and easier coordination between the operator and the user, such as real-time bus tracking, automatic status updates, Google Maps integration, schedules, and on-line reservations and ride requests
- Coordinate universal fare systems and transfer policies between transit operators

### **People and leaders: embrace a dynamic, diversified and sustainable economy that attracts and retains talent, enhances quality of life, and increases personal and household income.**

- Work with regional employers, economic development groups, and career centers to offer flexible start times for workers that rely on transit
- Work with regional employers, municipalities, counties, human service agencies, and medical professionals to find new avenues for a dedicated source of local match to leverage more federal funds for transit

## Funding and program priorities for FTA 5310 funding

While the goals and objectives in the previous section are important in framing a regional vision and approach for improving transit, not all the goals identified are directly tied to FTA's 5310 grant program, a central focus of this plan. Below are five topic areas that have a direct impact on the 5310 funding program. The following priorities should be used when evaluating projects proposed for this grant program.

### Priority populations

- People with disabilities
- People who are elderly
- People who are low-income
- People who live in environmental justice areas
- People who are veterans

### Priority locations

- Fresh food resources such as farmers markets and grocery stores
- Recreational locations such as parks and green space, movie theaters, restaurants, shopping centers, and regional events
- Educational institutions
- Decision-making bodies/public meetings
- Job centers

### Expansion strategies

- Expansions that cross municipal and county lines
- Continue to encourage and prioritize funding for projects that eliminate barriers to safe accessible transit, including projects that improve and go beyond ADA compliance

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- Prioritize transit expansions that can allow a typical work day, with some flexibility (6am – 7pm)
- Prioritize transit expansions that decrease wait times
- Prioritize transit expansions that add availability during the weekends

**Coordination strategies**

- Technological improvements that can allow for coordination between transit operators
- Technological improvements that have robust data-tracking software to be used in transit decision-making
- Technological improvements that allow for greater and easier coordination between the operator and the user, such as real-time bus tracking, automatic status updates, Google Maps integration, schedules, and on-line reservations and ride requests
- Coordinate universal fare systems between transit operators
- Develop cost-saving measures between transit operators, such as consolidation of services, vehicle sharing, shared staff, joint events, and training opportunities
- Coordinate consistent language, fares, and policies across transit operators
- Develop cost-saving measures between transit operators and human-resource agencies
- Develop tools to allow users to schedule rides across providers utilizing one-call, one-click systems
- Coordinate strategies between medical facilities and human-resource agencies to contribute to the local match of transit operators who travel to their facilities, especially when moving outside of dense urban boundaries
- Coordinate driver trainings between transit operators and human service agencies that utilize similar vehicles to increase awareness about ADA accessibility and transit vehicles

## Communication strategies

- Develop a regional transit website, featuring:
  - Up-to date figures of all transit operations in Northwestern Indiana
  - Links to transit operator websites and other information resources
  - Downloadable and printable maps and schedules
  - An address-lookup feature where users can determine what transit operators are near them
  - A streamlined comment box where a user can send comments about transit services to the
- Operator as well as regional decision makers and compliance officers
  - Instructions on how to use transit services
  - Instructions on how to attend and participate in transit operator public meetings, as well as other public meetings concerning transit including annual list of all public meetings associated with public transit and their description
- Work with partner agencies to host trainings for the public on how to use transit
- Utilize travel-assistants to assist new users in learning how to manage transit
- Communication regarding public transit should be accessible to all potential riders, regardless of disability. Operators and agencies affiliated with transit should be prepared to offer the following services:
- Full accessible websites, compatible with e-readers, and usable for people who have low-vision, blind, or have other cognitive and communication impediments. These websites should have image descriptions provided, so the image can be described using e-readers.
- All typeface used for communication utilizes sans-serif fonts
- Access to CART services for public meetings if an individual who is low-hearing or deaf requests it
- Access to a closed-circuit, assisted listening devices at all public meetings
- As-needed auxiliary aids and other services
- Publish easy-to-read understandable data about transit for increased public awareness