



**FINDING MEANING REPORT
TRANSIT ELEMENT**

**NIRPC 2050 METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

DRAFT

September 21, 2022

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I. Introduction

The Transit Plan Element of NIRPC's 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) will develop a roadmap for implementing an achievable plan for a transit network that is attractive to riders and sustainable within available resources. It is important that the Plan, developed with consensus by stakeholders, identifies a recommended network that serves local and regional goals.

This Finding Meaning report is the first phase of the Transit Plan. The report provides the background necessary to understand strengths and weaknesses of current transit services and identifies gaps and needs in order to define a path for the Creating Purpose and Purpose Driving Planning phases of the 2050 MTP update.

II. Existing Public Transportation Services

Commuter rail, fixed route bus, and demand response services are provided in the three-county NIRPC region. Each of these services are described below.

A. Commuter Rail

The South Shore Line regional rail service is Northwest Indiana's predominant transit operator, carrying substantially more riders than all of the bus systems combined. It is owned by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD). While the South Shore Line was originally a short name for the railroad's official name (Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad), it is now, essentially a brand name. Freight service is also operated on the same tracks by South Shore Freight, NICTD's tenant.

The South Shore operates passenger service from early morning until late in the evening, 7-days/week, between the South Bend Station (located just east of LaPorte County, the easternmost NIRPC county) and Millennium Station in Downtown Chicago. Most trains operate between Michigan City and Downtown Chicago, with some trains operating through to the east terminal, located at the South Bend Airport, and some operating only west of Gary. Certain stops are not served by all trains. See *Figure 1*.

The South Shore Line has a zonal based fare system with eleven zones. With one minor exception (within Michigan City), the minimum full fare between stations within the same zone (i.e., between Hammond and East Chicago-about four miles or between the three stations within Gary-about 6.5 miles) is \$4.00 (\$2.00 for reduced fare riders). This fare is higher than local bus fares for similar trips. The South Shore Line has a traditional commuter rail fare structure with a nominal reduction for 10-ride tickets, about a 10% reduction for 25-ride tickets, and more on unlimited ride monthly tickets. There is no transfer interchange program between South Shore Line and local buses, or the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA).

The South Shore uses electrically powered trains. Between South Bend and the Illinois state line, South Shore Line service operates on tracks owned by NICTD, from the state line to 115th Street, the tracks are owned by South Shore Freight, and between Kensington/115th Street Station and Downtown Chicago, the South Shore Line is operated on tracks owned by Metra (the commuter rail division of the Northeast Illinois Regional Transportation Authority-RTA).



Figure 1: South Shore Line Stations

NICTD is currently implementing two major infrastructure projects on the South Shore Line:

- **Double Tracking Project:** East of Gary, the railroad has previously operated on a single main track with passing sidings, greatly complicating operations, and limiting capacity. NICTD is currently installing a second main track as far east as Michigan City, in conjunction with a number of other upgrades. When the double-track project is completed (anticipated in 2024) a significant increase in the number of transit and a reduction in scheduled running time is anticipated. Seventy-nine (79) mile per hour operation is already permitted on major portions of the railroad, and more is anticipated as part of this project.
- **West Lake Corridor Project:** NICTD is constructing a new branch of South Shore Line service, approximately eight miles long and connecting a relocated Hammond Station (Hammond Gateway) to the Main Street Station on the Munster/Dyer border, with intermediate stations located in South Hammond and at Ridge Road in Munster. Twelve weekday peak period trips are planned to operate through to Downtown Chicago and 12 weekday off-peak period trips are planned to operate as shuttles connecting to mainline trains at the new Hammond Gateway station. See *Figure 2*.

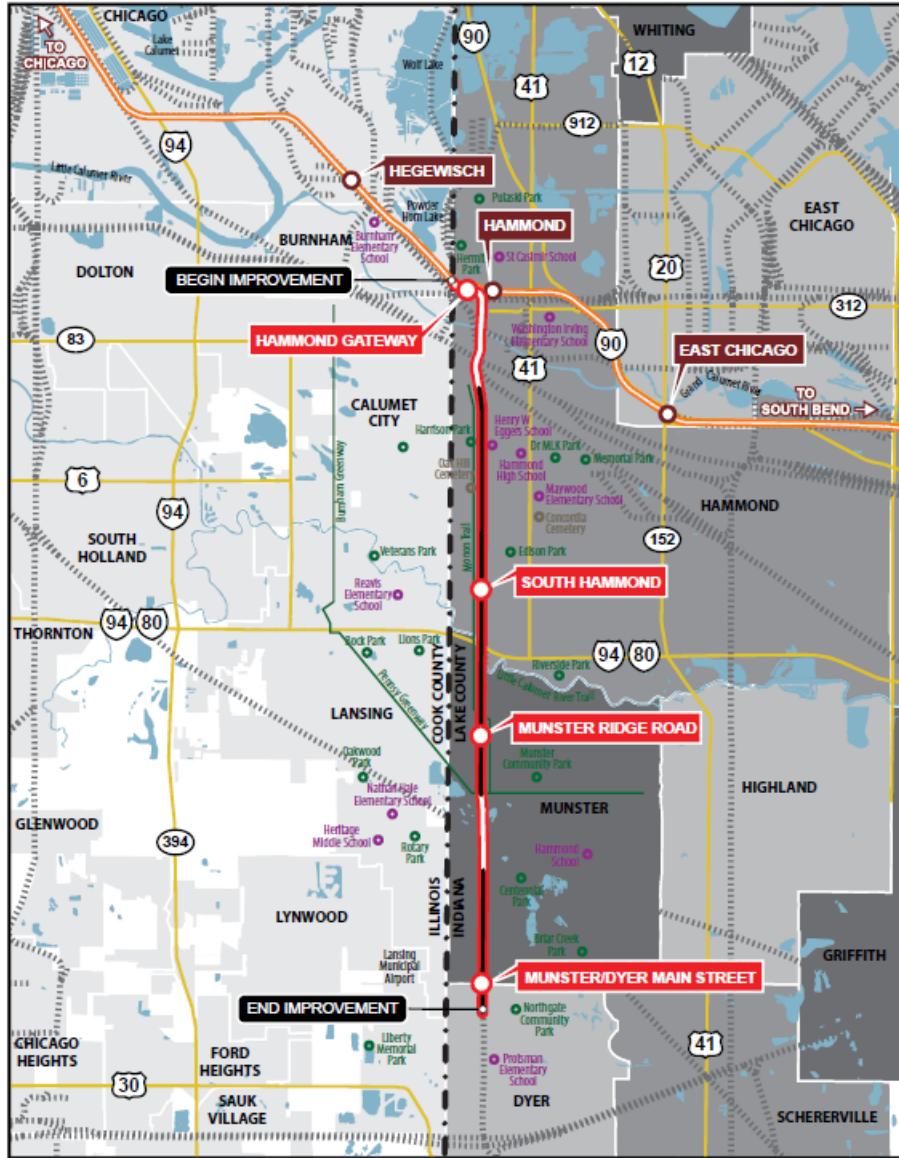


Figure 2: West Lake Corridor Project

B. Fixed Route Bus Services

There are four bus service operators in the NIRPC region that operate fixed route bus service.

1. Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC)

GPTC is the largest bus operator in the NIRPC region; it operates fixed route bus service, using full-size buses, as well as the federally required complementary paratransit service for passengers with disabilities associated with these routes. All service is operated in-house. While it is based in Gary, a substantial portion of its operations are in the neighboring municipalities of Hammond, East Chicago, Merrillville, Munster, and Highland. This “regional service” is supported by funding through Gary, Lake County, Hammond, and Merrillville. Higher fares are charged on routes outside the Gary city limits. Service on all routes is operated for approximately 16 hours/day on weekdays and 8 hours on Saturdays. GPTC service information is shown in *Table 1*.

GPTC fares are \$1.60 for full fares for riders within Gary (80¢ for reduced fares) and \$2.25 on regional routes (\$1.00 for reduced fares) regardless of the length the rider’s trip.

Table 1: Gary Public Transit Corporation (GPTC) Service Information

	Number	Name	Scheduled Frequency (minutes)
Gary local routes	L1	E. 35 th /Marshalltown	60
	L2	Oak & County Line Rd.	60
	L3	6 th Ave. Tolleston	60
	L4	University Park	60
	L5	Horace Mann/Village via Taft	60
Regional routes	R-BMX	Broadway Metro Express	60
	R1	Lakeshore Connection	120
	R2	US 30 Shuttle	60
	R3	Burr Lake Ridge	60
	R4	Lakeshore South	60 (no Sat. service)
	R5	Merrillville Shuttle	40

It should be noted that two Pace bus routes (Routes 350 Sibley and 364 159th) come one block across the state line from Illinois into Hammond via Sibley Boulevard to meet GPTC Routes R1 and R4. Pace is the suburban bus operating agency of the RTA. A substantial number of passengers transfer here. There are no fare provisions for interagency transfers; a new fare is required.

2. Valpo Transit

Valpo Transit operates a few different types of fixed route service in the City of Valparaiso:

V-Line: Local service, coined the V-Line, is provided on three routes, Brown, Green, and Yellow within Valparaiso and some adjacent areas. This service is operated with small “cutaway” buses. The Green Line serves the east side of the city, the Yellow Line serves the west side of the city, and the Brown Line serves the south side of the city and Valparaiso University. All three routes have fixed stops but can deviate up to ¾ mile from any posted stop provided the rider calls 24 hours in advance to request this; only one deviation per trip is allowed. Because it offers this route deviation option, complementary paratransit service is not provided.

All local service is operated hourly. Fourteen (14) trips are operated on the Green and Yellow routes from 6:15 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. Monday-Saturday, with eight trips and reduced hours on Sundays. The Brown Line operates from noon to 9:00 p.m. Monday-Sunday with eight trips No service is operated on major holidays. Fares are \$1.00 or 50¢ for reduced fare riders.

South Shore Connect: The South Shore Connect is an express bus service from Downtown Valparaiso to the Dune Park South Shore Line Station in Chesterton, Indiana. Service operates on a schedule built around meeting South Shore Line trains with six round trips operated every day (with a different schedule for weekdays and weekends, coordinated with train schedules). Fares are the same as on the Valparaiso local service.

Chicago Dash: The Chicago Dash is a weekday express commuter bus service from Downtown Valparaiso to Downtown Chicago. Using intercity coach-type buses, three morning trips leave Valparaiso picking up from a commuter parking lot at 270 Brown Street at 6:00 a.m., 6:30 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. and the three return trips originate at Randolph and Michigan at 4:00 p.m., 4:30 p.m., and 5:00 p.m., with stops at two other downtown locations. The cash fare is \$8.00, similar to the South Shore Line fare, with reductions for 10-ride and monthly tickets purchased through the Token Transit app. The website shows that an intermediate stop at Hobart has been proposed.

3. Michigan City Transit (MCT)

MCT operates four local routes, with each leaving from the library in Downtown Michigan City, hourly from 6:30 a.m. (8:30 am on Saturdays) to 5:30 p.m.; there is no Sunday/holiday service. Small buses are used. Fares are \$1.00 or 50¢ for reduced fare riders. Three of the routes directly serve the South Shore Line's station at 11th Street (currently closed due to construction as part of the double-track project).

4. East Chicago Transit (ECT)

ECT operates two routes within the City. On Route 3 West Calumet, ten trips are operated on weekdays between approximately 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. There are six trips on Saturdays, between approximately 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. On Route 2 Crosstown, nine trips are operated on weekdays between approximately 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. and five trips are operated on Saturdays between approximately 9 a.m. and 4:40 p.m. There is no Sunday/holiday service. Headways are irregular and buses operate more than an hour apart. ECT has always been operated as a service that is free to riders. Medium-sized conventional transit buses are used. The City operates complementary paratransit service for the disabled. All trips originate at the East Chicago South Shore Line station. It is worth noting that GPTC Route R1 Lakeshore Connection operates on the same streets (notably, Indianapolis Boulevard and Columbus Drive) as ECT does for approximately four miles; the R1 only operates every two hours.

C. Demand Response Services

There are three demand response services that are operated by government agencies that are open to the general public. Demand response services are services that pick people up at their homes and drop them at their destinations, either "door to door" or "curb to curb".

1. TransPorte

The City of LaPorte operates a demand-response service within its city limits. Service is provided between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Saturdays. There is no service on Sundays/holidays. The general public fare is \$3.50, fare for seniors (over 60) and disabled passengers are \$2.50, and child fare is \$1.25 (when accompanying an adult). Service requests are all handled by phone calls to the TransPorte dispatcher; the agency does not use an app. The agency offers three types of trips: subscription: (i.e., recurring), scheduled (requested more than 24 hours in advance), and demand-response (same day, even right away; these are the lowest priority and may not be able to be accommodated).

2. North Township Dial-a Ride

North Township Dial a Ride includes the communities of East Chicago, Hammond, Highland, Munster, and Whiting. This service is operated Monday-Friday between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Service must be requested at least 24 hours in advance. Riders need to reside in North Township and be going somewhere in North Township. No fares are charged. Much of the area served is also served by GPTC and ECT fixed route buses.

3. Lake County Community Services (LCCS)

Lake County Community Services operates a demand response service that is provided to eleven municipalities in Lake County and two townships. Service hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; no weekend service is provided. In order to schedule services, the rider needs to call in 48 hours in advance. There is no app to use to schedule service. Fares are \$7.00/general public and \$5.00/seniors and disabled but can be reduced based on where the rider lives as different funding sources allows for different fares.

4. Porter County Demand Response Services (PCACS)

Unlike the first three services discussed above, this service is only available to certain individuals based on eligibility criteria. PCAS provides demand response services to seniors (60 years+) and those with disabilities. Service is only available in Porter County. Riders must be registered ahead of time. Rides need to be arranged ahead of time by calling in or using an app. Rides are prioritized by type with medical trips and grocery store trips handled first; subscription type trips (e.g., to dialysis) are allowed. Service hours are Monday and Wednesday, 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There is no Friday service due to a driver shortage, and no weekend service.

5. Other Demand Response Services

Note that there are other demand response services in the NIRPC region that are provided by private agencies to transport specific populations. Since they do only serve specific trips and populations, they are not included in this analysis.

D. Fare Collection

Fare collection has evolved over the years for transit agencies. In order to reduce the potential for robbery incidents for bus drivers, most bus transit agencies began requiring riders to pay with exact fares in the early 1970s, removing drivers from involvement with cash; however, for riders, having to carry exact fare is a major inconvenience which depresses ridership. To mitigate these conditions some small agencies, such as ECT and NT, have simply gone to fare-free operation.

In recent years most agencies have adopted smartphone-based apps. Typically, riders can download these at no charge. Larger agencies, (such as the Chicago Transit Agency) have typically purchased custom apps, which may involve riders setting up an account (i.e., Ventra, which it shares with Pace and Metra). Because of the cost of custom-developed apps, smaller agencies typically use one of the publicly available apps that are available. Systems with simple fare structures, which require little/no customization may choose to use apps that require little/no up-front payment but keep a commission on each sale. These apps generally do not require accounts to be established.

GPTC and Valpo have adopted the Token Transit app and have paid for a certain amount of customization. NICTD/South Shore Line has adopted the Bytemark app. This has required customization to accommodate its zone fares and multiple-ride tickets.

All of these agencies indicated in interviews that it would be difficult and unaffordable to transition to another app that could be used by multiple agencies in the region.

III. Socioeconomic Analysis

In order to understand the potential for public transportation services in the NIRPC region, a socioeconomic analysis was conducted. Population and employment density thresholds indicate the type of transit and the ridership levels that can be supported by transit service. The highest population and employment density areas can support high-capacity transit including commuter rail, light rail, bus rapid transit (BRT) systems and fixed route bus systems. Demand response services are more appropriate for low density areas.

In addition to density thresholds, it also is important to look at populations that are more transit dependent. An analysis of each of these populations living in the NIRPC region was conducted and is described below. The geography analyzed were Census Bureau block groups. Both percentages and concentrations (i.e. density) of these groups were analyzed.

A. Population and Job Density

The population density levels in the NIRPC region, was mapped and is shown in *Figure 3*. The highest population density in the study area can be found in the Southside neighborhood in East Chicago. This neighborhood features two-flat housing that promotes greater population density than standalone, single-family homes. While this type of housing is also present in other parts of the study area, this area has fewer vacant lots and buildings than comparative neighborhoods. East Chicago also has the other

five densest neighborhoods in the study area. Other pockets of highest density areas in the NIRPC region are in Hammond, Gary, Michigan City, Whiting, and Griffith.

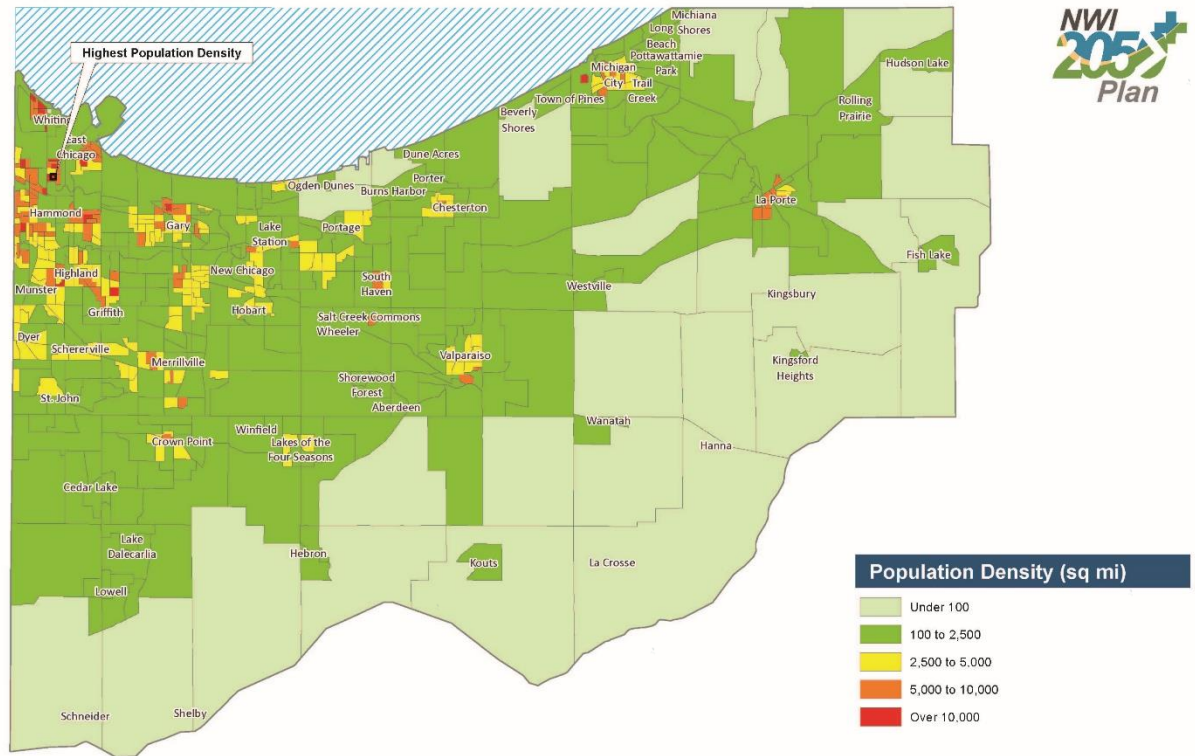


Figure 3: Population Density

Job density is highest near Franciscan Hospital and along Hohman Avenue south of the hospital in Downtown Hammond; two others of the top five densest areas in terms of jobs are also areas with hospitals: Gary (Methodist Hospital) and Munster (Community Hospital). The downtown areas of LaPorte, Valparaiso, and Michigan City also have greater job density. The highest number of jobs regardless of density is in the retail corridor near the Southlake Mall in Merrillville. See *Figure 4*.

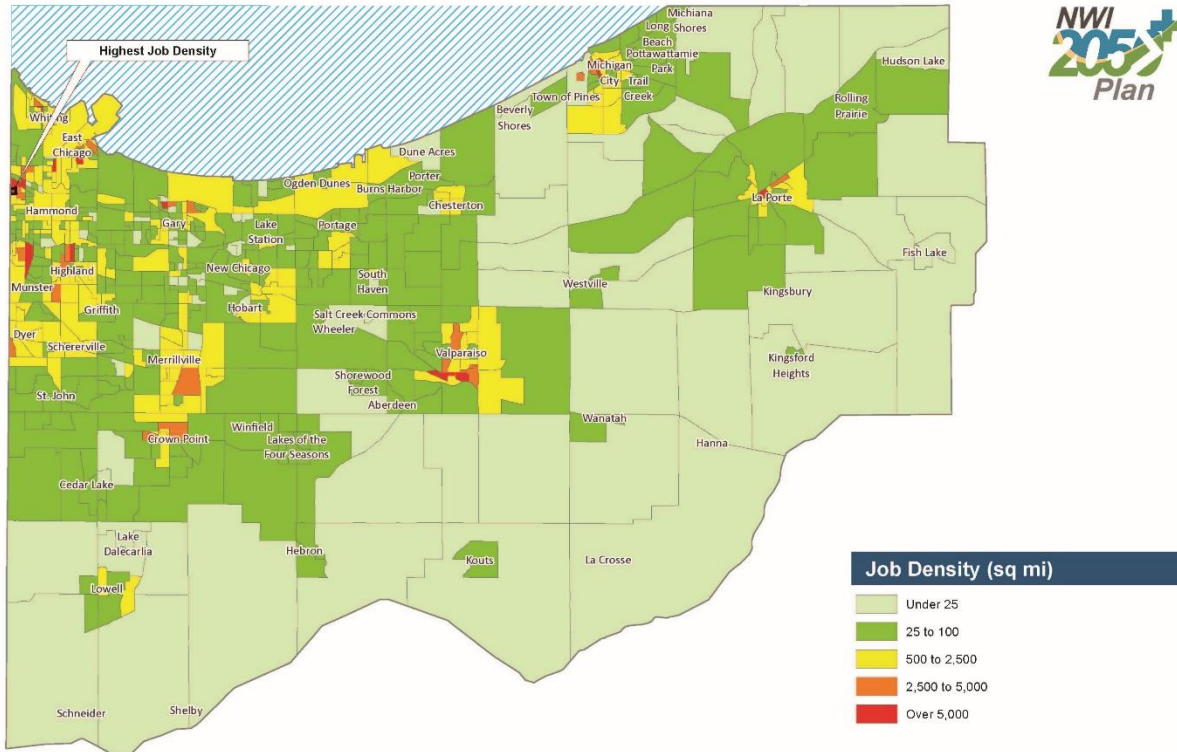


Figure 4: Job Density

B. Transit Dependent Populations

Certain populations tend to be more transit dependent¹; these populations are typically:

- ◆ Low Income (below \$15,000 annual income) – Low-income residents are about 1.5 times more likely to use transit
- ◆ Minority Population - Minority populations are more than twice as likely to use transit
- ◆ Persons Over 65 - People over 65 years old are 1.5 times more likely to use transit.
- ◆ Persons without a car - Those without access to a car are almost eight times more likely to use transit
- ◆ Individuals with a Disability (18-64) - Persons with disabilities are over 5 times more likely more likely to use transit

1. Low Income

The west side of Hammond and the east-central Gary have the highest concentration of low income in the study area. There are also high concentrations of low-income populations in areas of East Chicago, in and around the Lakeside Gardens low-income apartment complex. Of the areas with the greater density of low-income populations, three are in East Chicago (Southside and just north of the Sunnyside neighborhoods) and two are in Gary. See *Figure 5*.

¹ “TCRP Report 28: Transit Markets of the Future: The Challenge of Change” Table 4 (Work trip data).

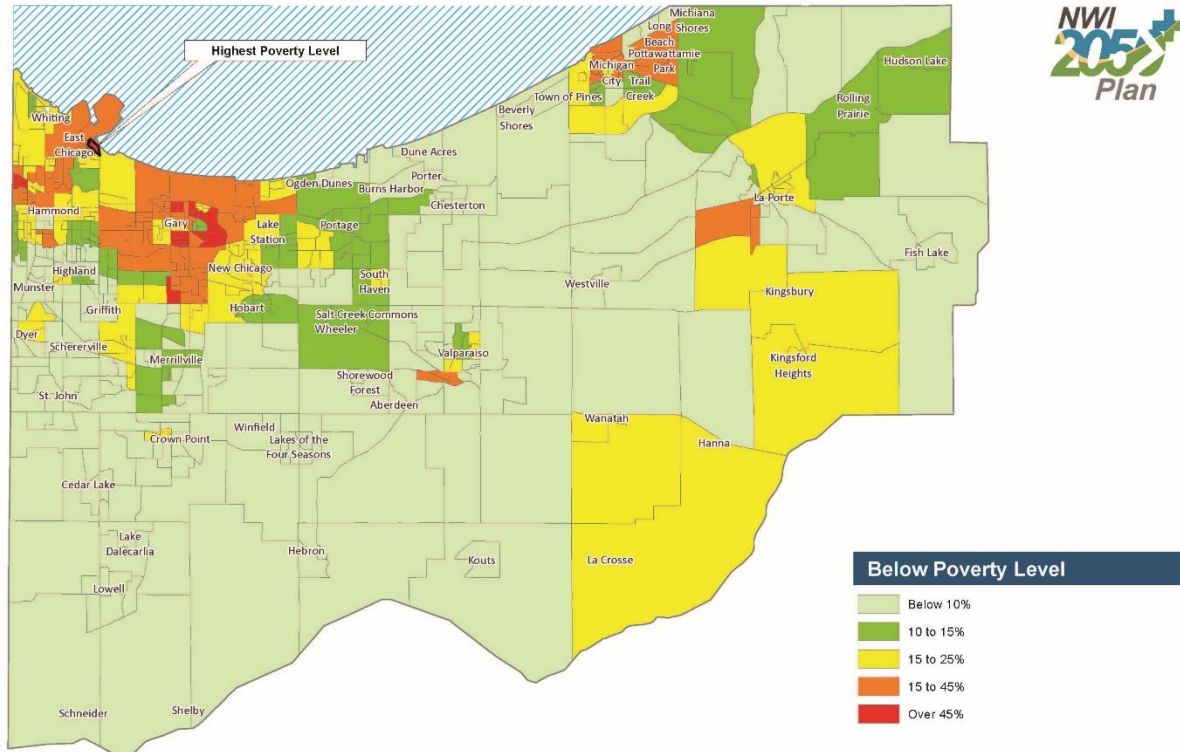


Figure 5: Low Income Populations

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2. Minority Population

The highest concentrations of minority residents are located in East Chicago, Hammond, Gary, and Michigan City. While minority residents are located throughout the Region, rural areas in Northwest Indiana have significantly fewer minority residents than urban areas, and some block groups registered no minority residents. See *Figure 6*.

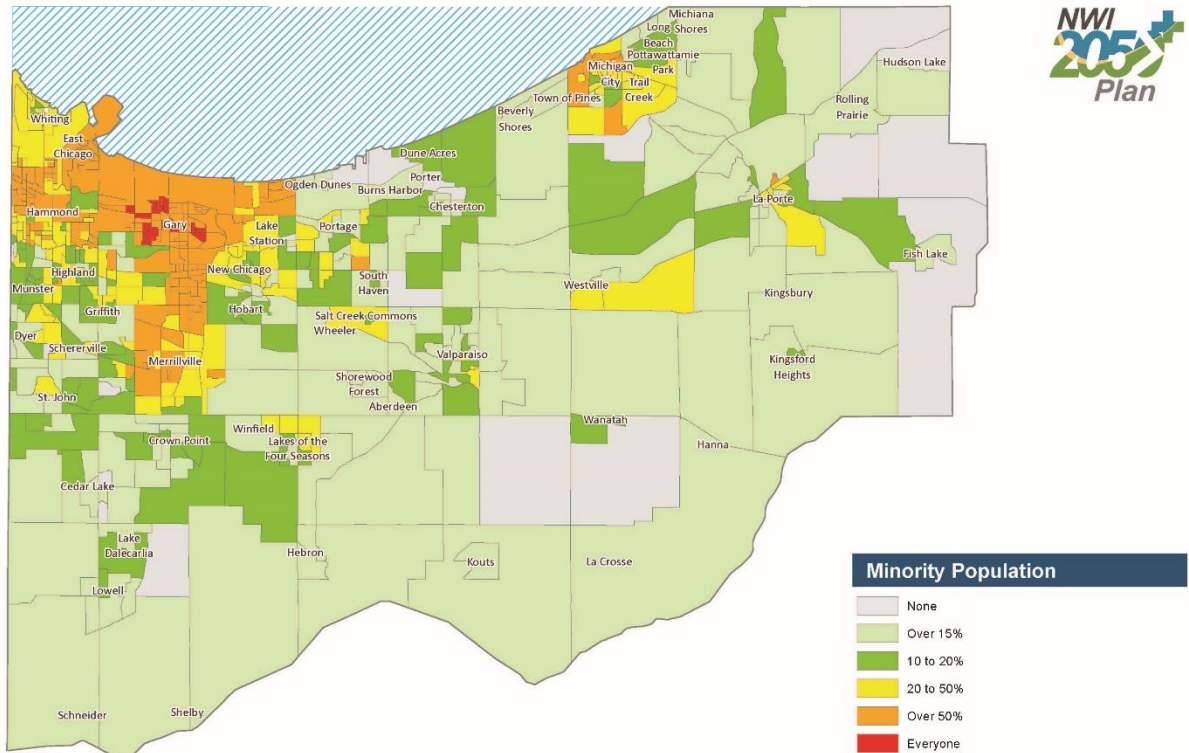


Figure 6- Minority Populations

3. People with Disabilities

Unlike the previous demographic groups, there are relatively high percentages of people with disabilities in rural parts of the study area. High concentrations of people with disabilities are present in both urban and rural areas in the Region. Areas with greater numbers of people with disabilities include in the municipalities of Hammond, East Chicago, New Chicago, Lake Station, LaPorte, and in rural LaPorte County. There also is a large percentage of persons with disabilities living just south of the Hammond South Shore Line station. See *Figure 7*.

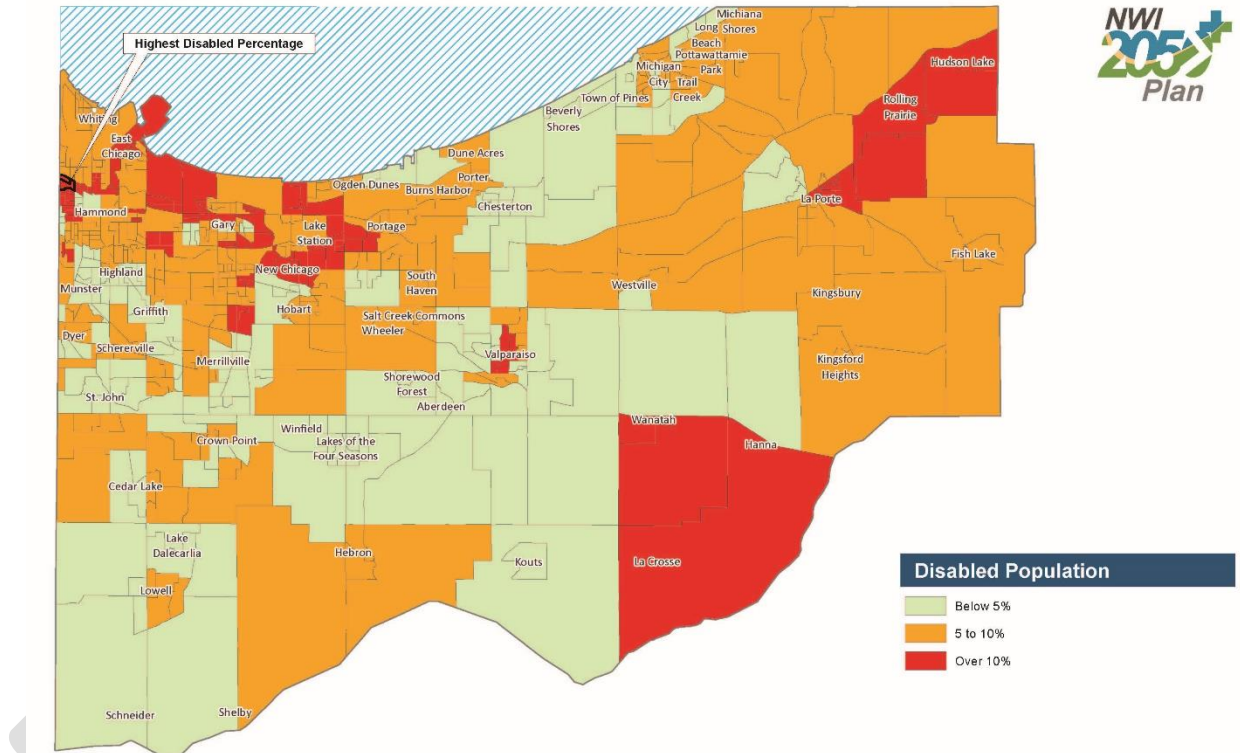


Figure 7: People with Disabilities

4. Senior Population

Concentrations of seniors (65 and over) are present throughout Northwest Indiana. The highest percentage of those 65 and over live in Merrillville, in the neighborhood where the Golden Living Center, Belvedere Senior Center, and the Spring Mill Health Campus are located. See *Figure 8*.

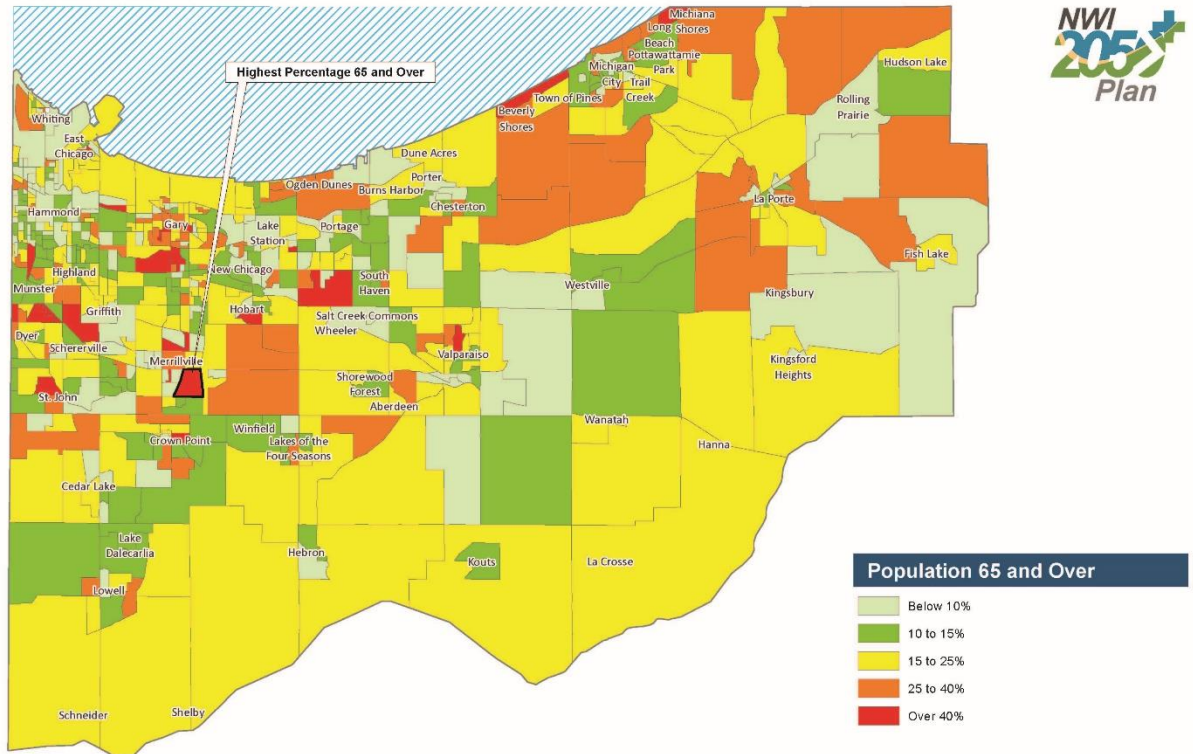


Figure 8: Senior Population

5. No Vehicle Access

People with no access to a vehicle are concentrated in Gary and East Chicago. The highest percentage of people without access to a vehicle corresponds to the block group with the highest percentage living in poverty (Lakeside Gardens in East Chicago). See *Figure 9*.

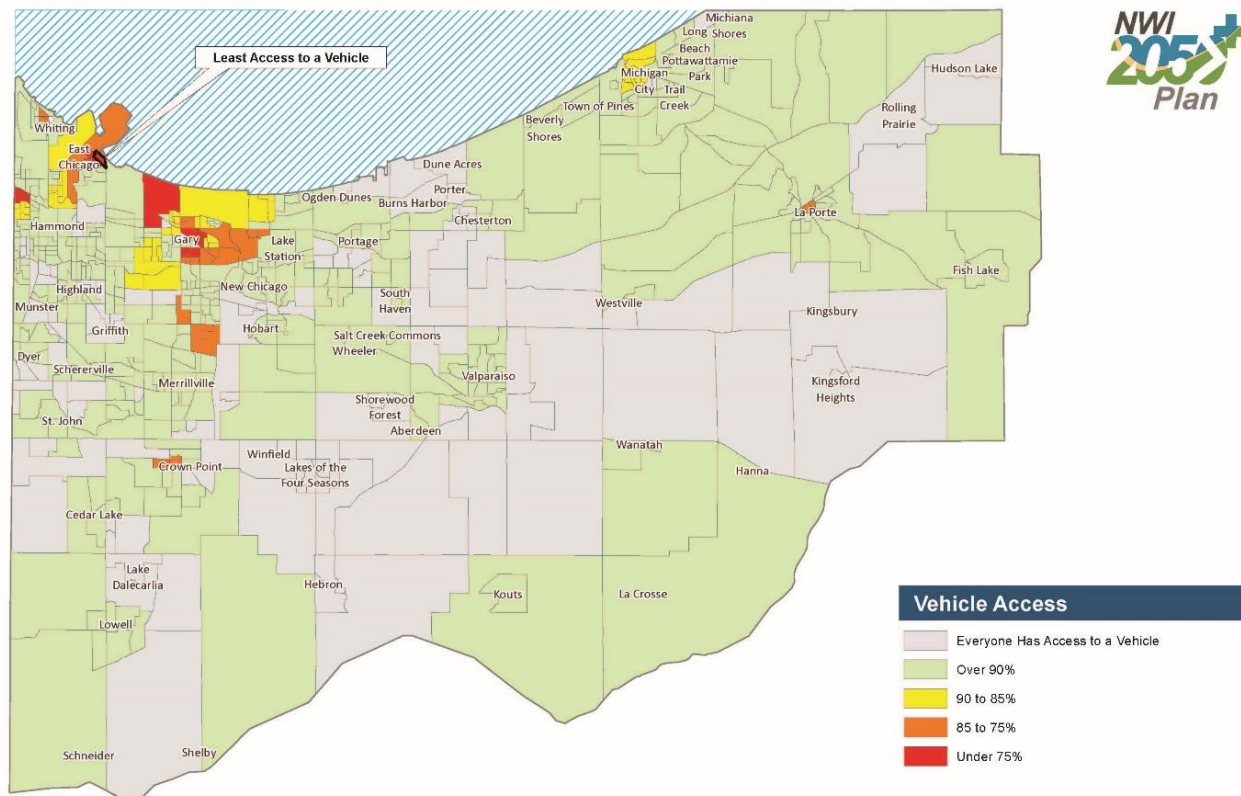


Figure 9: Vehicle Availability

C. Transit Dependency Index Data

By combining the individual factors above, a transit dependency index is created that includes a formula-based equation to measure overall transit dependency.

The equation takes into consideration the fact that these subgroups have different propensities to use transit. Multiplying the population of the groups by the factors shown below provides a more accurate picture of transit demand rather than just using total population. The methodology was based on data from block groups. The equation also considers the density of the block group surveyed.

$$\text{Population} + (\text{Minority} \times 2.3) + (\text{With Disability} \times 5.5) + (\text{Over 65} \times 1.6) + (\text{Below Poverty Level} \times 1.4) + (\text{Carless} \times 8) + (\text{Jobs} \times 0.50) + (\text{Service Jobs} \times 0.75) / (\text{Block Group Acres})$$

Transit demand index maps were created for the study area and are shown in *Figures 10 and 11*. As indicated, northern Lake County and LaPorte County have areas of high to very high transit demand. These areas are focused on the cities of Hammond, Gary, East Chicago Michigan City and LaPorte.

Figure 12 shows the existing transit services in the NIRPC region overlaid on the transit demand index map. Eighty-three (83) percent of high transit demand areas are accessible by public transportation services. The high transit demand areas not served by public transportation services are in Whiting in the neighborhoods surrounding Whiting High School, the Porte De L'eau Apartments (in Highland), and the Hampton in Highland apartment complex (also in Highland). More detailed transit demand index maps of each community served by fixed route services are shown in *Appendix A*.

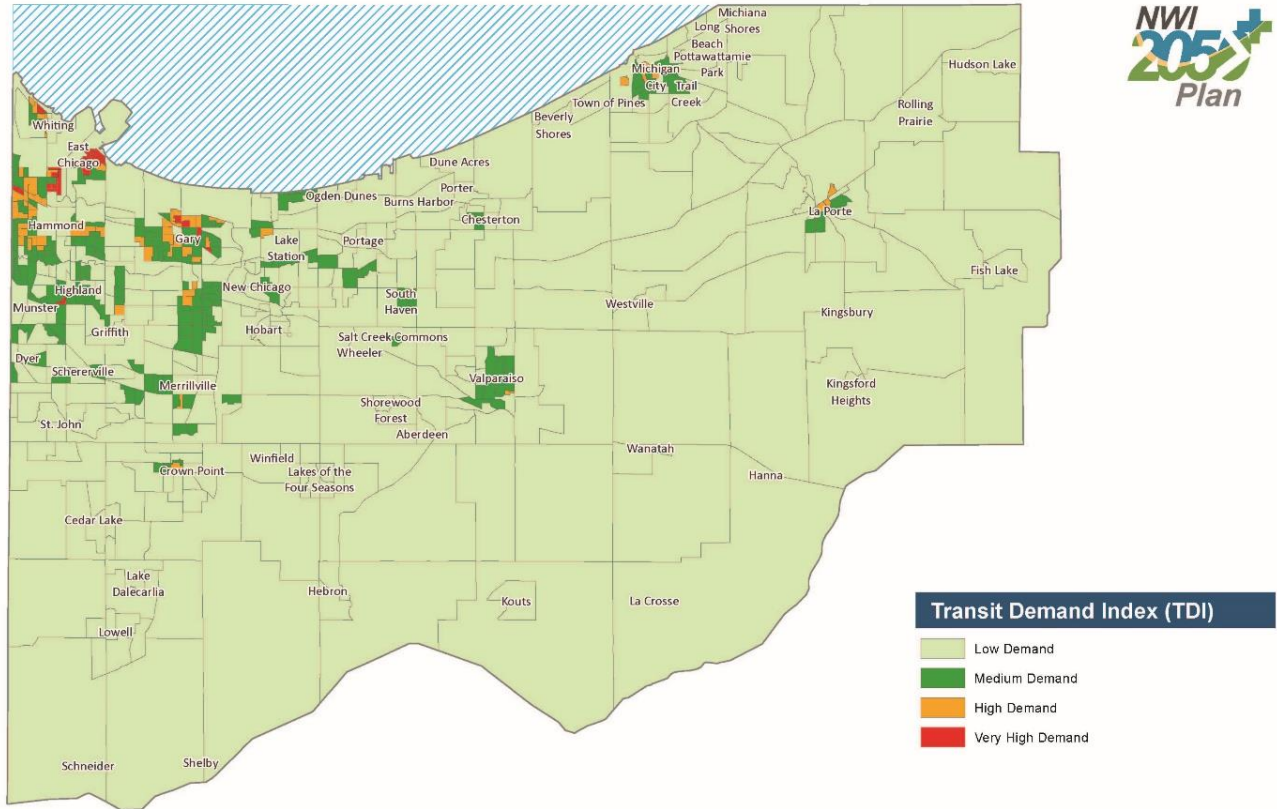
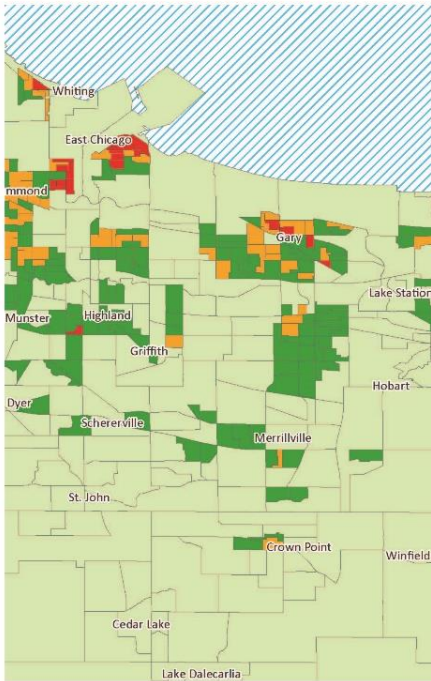


Figure 10: Study Area Transit Demand Index

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NORTHERN LAKE COUNTY



NORTHERN LA PORTE COUNTY



Areas with High a TDI

- Low Demand
- Medium Demand
- High Demand
- Very High Demand

Low Income, Over 65, Disabled (18 to 64), Service Jobs, All Jobs, Population, No Vehicle Available were analyzed for this index.

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Figure 11: High Transit Demand Areas

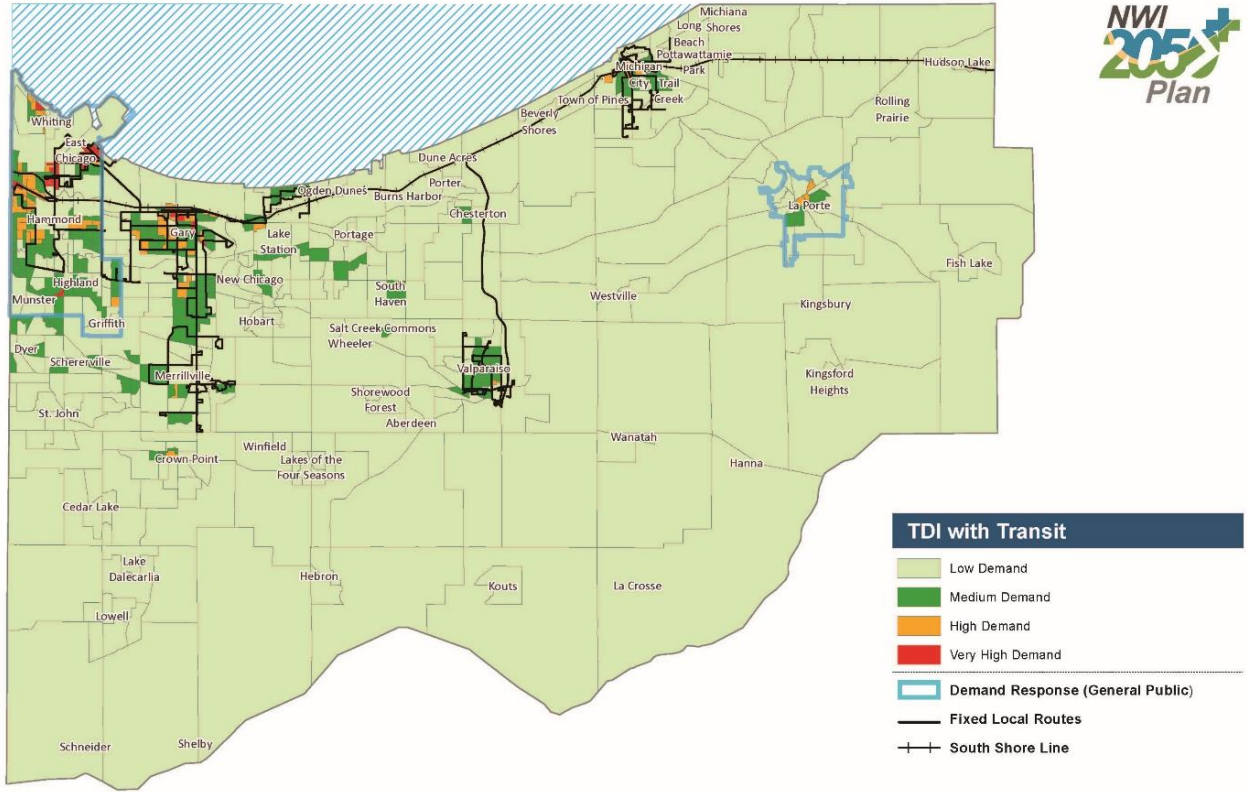


Figure 12: Transit Demand Index with Transit Service Overlaid

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IV. Assessing Gaps and Needs

There were different ways to start identifying transit gaps and needs in the Region; the following methods were used:

- Assessment of existing transit services to determine service efficiency, effectiveness, service overlaps and attractiveness
- Demographic analysis of transit routes using concentrations of overall population, jobs and transit dependent populations
- Stakeholder interviews with transit agencies and municipalities
- Input from the Transit Steering Committee
- Input from the public during the June 21-23rd public meetings
- Input from the online public survey hosted by NIRPC during the months of July and August.

A. Service Efficiency/Effectiveness Analysis

A simple analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing fixed route transit services was performed using statistics collected annually by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and published in agency profiles in the National Transit Database (NTD). Data for 2019, the last pre-pandemic year was used. *Table 2* indicates the efficiency and effectiveness measures selected for analysis from the NTD for each of the transit operators in the NIRPC region. Service efficiency is measured by examining a transit provider's operating expenses divided by vehicle revenue miles and vehicle revenue hours; a lower number indicates a service that is more efficient. Service effectiveness is measured by calculating annual rides per capita, dividing unlinked passenger trips by operating expenses, and dividing unlinked trips by vehicle revenue miles and vehicle revenue hours. Higher numbers for annual rides per capita and unlinked trips divided by vehicle revenue miles and vehicle revenue hours indicate a service that is more effective, while a lower dollar amount for operating hours divided by unlinked passenger trips makes a service more effective.

Table 2 shows the efficiency and effectiveness factors for the transit providers in the NIRPC region. An analysis of the transit agencies that provide fixed route bus service in the NICTD study area shows that the transit agencies in Gary and East Chicago (which cover a larger area and serve a larger population) are much less efficient than those in Valparaiso and Michigan City because their operating expenses are greater than the other services. The service effectiveness tends to vary between the fixed route services as well as between the demand response services when looking at the results.

Table 2: Efficiency and Effectiveness Factors for Transit Providers²

	NICTD	GPTC	MCT	Valpo	ECT	LaPorte	North Twp	LCCS
Veh. Op.in Max Svc. (Rail)	70							
Veh. Op.in Max Svc. (Fixed Route)		17	4	6	3			
Veh. Op.in Max Svc. (Demand Response)		4	2		1	5	6	18
Veh. Op.in Max Svc. (Commuter Bus)			2	7				
Unlinked trips	995,049	505,733	126,089	96,050	72,076	28,291	41,002	22,348
Service area pop.	958,644	102,746	31,479	31,730	27,697	21,692	162,855	216,180
Service Efficiency								
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Mile	\$13.44	\$7.98	\$5.14	\$3.56	\$9.23	\$7.18	\$3.22	\$4.51
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Hr.	\$467.28	\$105.50	\$79.38	\$59.33	\$103.44	\$65.86	\$38.01	\$50.47
Service Effectiveness								
- Annual rides per capita	1.04	4.9	4.0	3.0	2.6	1.3	0.3	0.10
- Op Exp/unlinked Psgr trip (bus)	\$52.99	\$14.11	\$11.25	\$10.78	\$15.97	\$25.10	\$18.04	\$37.38
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Mi.	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.1
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Hr.	8.8	7.5	7.1	5.5	6.5	2.6	2.1	1.4
NICTD = South Shore Line GPTC = Gary MCT = Michigan City Valpo = Valparaiso ECT = East Chicago TransPorte = La Porte LCCS = South Township								

A common way of analyzing the relative effectiveness of transit systems is to compare to peer agencies, using NTD data. Peers were selected based on similar sized municipality and socioeconomic conditions. Maps showing where the peers are located are in *Appendix B*.

Results are indicated in *Tables 3 and 4*. To interpret how the NIRPC region transit agencies compare to their peers, refer to the “above/below median” column. Where there is a cost associated with a measurement it is better to be below the median value of all peer agencies, which is indicated by the down arrow (most of these are in the service efficiency category). For all other measurements, it is better to be above the median peer value, indicated by the up arrow (all of these are in the service effectiveness category).

² Data is from 2020

Table 3: Peer Comparisons—Fixed Route Systems³

Gary (Fixed Route)								Valparaiso (Fixed Route)								
MODE: Fixed Route	GPTC	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN	Valpo	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN
			HART	CUE	Commerce	Norwalk	Cecil				Burlink	Laudergo	PART	CATA	Arcadia	
Veh. Op.in Max Svc.	20		8	8	10	24	8	9	13		6	10	7	11	6	9
Unlinked trips, FR (ann.)	493,179		55,829	488,078	314,383	1,187,289	59,931	401,231	96,050		47,327	182,437	51,984	60,184	56,364	58,274
Service area pop.	102,746		200,495	22,565	12,997	637,365	102,383	102,565	31,730		449,772	129,495	61,963	155,236	41,709	95,729
Service Efficiency																
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Mile	\$7.77	↓	\$8.69	\$9.00	\$12.71	\$13.05	\$4.31	\$8.85	\$3.56	↓	\$4.63	\$10.08	\$4.49	\$8.37	\$6.65	\$5.64
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Hr.	\$102.76	↓	\$141.92	\$115.21	\$136.03	\$143.56	\$87.36	\$125.62	\$59.33	↓	\$85.59	\$95.47	\$92.67	\$111.65	\$75.21	\$89.13
Service Effectiveness																
- Annual rides per capita	4.80	↑	0.28	21.63	24.19	1.86	0.59	3.33	3.03	↑	0.11	1.41	0.84	0.39	1.35	1.10
- Op Exp/unlinked Psgr trip	\$13.08	↑	\$58.86	\$8.20	\$12.88	\$11.72	\$23.86	\$12.98	\$10.78	↓	\$26.92	\$12.10	\$27.33	\$12.04	\$26.91	\$19.51
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Mi.	0.9	↔	0.1	1.1	1	1.1	0.2	1.0	0.3	↔	0.2	0.8	0.2	0.7	0.2	0.3
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Hr.	11.9	↑	2.4	14.1	10.6	12.2	3.7	11.25	5.5	↑	3.2	7.9	3.4	9.3	2.8	4.5
Michigan City (Fixed Route)								East Chicago (Fixed Route)								
MODE: Fixed Route	MCT	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN	ECT	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN
			MTS	Steel Valley	Owensboro	Electric City	City Line				Clarkstown	Cecil	Long beach	Medina County	HART	
Veh. Op.in Max Svc.	4		4	7	9	6	7	7	3		8	8	5	7	8	8
Unlinked trips, FR (ann.)	120,446		120,388	131,745	274,442	295,336	196,576	164,161	72,076		50,238	59,931	156,690	35,148	55,829	57,880
Service area pop.	31,479		49,490	22,113	57,276	27,293	57,836	40,485	27,697		300,173	102,383	33,275	174,091	200,495	138,237
Service Efficiency																
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Mile	\$6.06	↑	\$4.88	\$7.02	\$4.34	\$3.19	\$4.92	\$4.90	\$8.00	↑	\$6.15	\$4.31	\$11.30	\$6.05	\$8.69	\$7.08
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Hr.	\$82.71	↑	\$72.67	\$101.20	\$63.08	\$58.31	\$66.84	\$69.76	\$108.21	↑	\$105.17	\$87.36	\$101.46	\$77.58	\$141.92	\$103.32
Service Effectiveness																
- Annual rides per capita	3.83	↓	2.43	5.96	4.79	10.82	3.40	4.31	2.60	↑	0.17	0.59	4.71	0.20	0.28	0.43
- Op Exp/unlinked Psgr trip	\$9.44	↑	\$8.66	\$12.26	\$6.30	\$3.33	\$4.19	\$7.48	\$13.04	↓	\$23.15	\$23.86	\$15.05	\$24.03	\$58.86	\$23.51
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Mi.	0.6	↔	0.6	0.6	0.7	1	1.2	0.65	0.6	↑	0.3	0.2	0.8	0.3	0.1	0.3
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Hr.	8.8	↓	8.4	8.3	10	17.5	15.9	9.4	8.3	↑	4.5	3.7	6.7	3.2	2.4	4.1

³ For peer comparisons, only statistics from the dominant mode are shown

Table 4: Peer Comparisons—Commuter Rail and Demand Response Systems

South Shore Line (Commuter Rail)									La Porte (Demand Response)							
	NICTD	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN	TransPorte	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN
			Sound Transit	VRE	CalTrain (West Bay)	MARC	Tri Rail				Go Transit	Allen Co RTA	JATA	Battle Creek	Shoreline Metro	
Veh. Op.in Max Svc.	70		70	99	134	149	43	85	5		30	8	7	7	6	7
Unlinked trips, (ann.)	995,049		1,265,882	3,222,428	13,692,716	6,680,248	742,714	2,244,155	28,291		42,469	26,751	22,159	23,431	18,564	25,091
Service area pop.	958,644		3,205,700	2,238,365	3,614,716	7,811,145	133,588	2,722,033	21,692		66,083	106,331	158,510	87,735	59,490	76,909
Service Efficiency																
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Mile	\$13.44	↓	\$35.60	\$36.33	\$20.19	\$28.81	\$29.29	\$29.05	\$7.18	↓	\$3.08	\$8.17	\$9.18	\$12.53	\$8.04	\$8.11
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Hr.	\$467.28	↓	\$1,072.04	\$1,119.81	\$653.01	\$1,104.25	\$818.89	\$945.47	\$65.86	↓	\$62.86	\$117.06	\$117.73	\$125.88	\$95.24	\$106.15
Service Effectiveness																
- Annual rides per capita	1.04	↓	0.39	1.44	3.79	0.86	5.56	1.24	1.30	↑	0.64	0.25	0.14	0.27	0.31	0.29
- Op Exp/unlinked Psgr trip	\$52.99	↑	\$42.93	\$24.19	\$9.57	\$24.14	\$26.27	\$25.23	\$25.10	↓	\$14.44	\$33.97	\$60.69	\$63.71	\$42.44	\$38.21
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Mi.	0.3	↓	0.8	1.5	2.1	1.2	1.1	1.15	0.3	↓	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Hr.	8.8	↓	25	46.3	68.3	45.7	31.2	38.45	2.6	↑	4.4	3.4	1.9	2	2.2	2.4
North Township (Demand Response)									Lake County Community Services (Demand Response)							
	North Twp	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN	LCCS	Above/ Below Median	PEERS					MEDIAN
			LCCS	Cecil	HART	Commerce	GCPT				North Twp	GCT	Cecil	HART	Medina County	
Veh. Op.in Max Svc.	6		18	7	12	4	4	7	18		6	4	7	12	14	10
Unlinked trips, (ann.)	18,961		22,348	19,839	20,576	9,032	12,554	19,400	22,348		18,961	12,554	19,839	20,576	25,438	20,208
Service area pop.	170,200		216,180	102,383	200,495	12,997	102,746	136,473	216,180		170,200	102,746	102,383	200,495	174,091	172,146
Service Efficiency																
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Mile	\$6.91	↓	\$4.51	\$3.60	\$15.44	\$12.70	\$10.68	\$8.80	\$4.51	↓	\$6.91	\$10.68	\$3.60	\$15.44	\$4.44	\$5.71
- Op Exp/Rev. Veh. Hr.	\$85.06	↓	\$50.47	\$77.27	\$191.16	\$131.74	\$140.75	\$108.40	\$50.47	↓	\$85.06	\$140.75	\$77.27	\$191.16	\$57.56	\$81.17
Service Effectiveness																
- Annual rides per capita	0.11	↓	0.10	0.19	0.10	0.69	0.12	0.12	0.10	↓	0.11	0.12	0.19	0.10	0.15	0.12
- Op Exp/unlinked Psgr trip	\$37.45	↓	\$37.38	\$21.43	\$95.66	\$86.76	\$54.59	\$46.02	\$37.38	↓	\$37.45	\$54.59	\$21.43	\$95.66	\$44.46	\$40.96
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Mi.	0.2	↔	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	↓	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2
- Unlinked trips/Rev. Veh. Hr.	2.3	↑	1.4	3.6	2	1.5	2.6	2.2	1.4	↓	2.3	2.6	3.6	2	1.3	2.2

B. Service Overlaps

An analysis was performed to identify areas where overlapping service is operated in an area by two or more transit agencies. The only portion of the study area where there is overlap is in the northwest corner of the NIRPC region. Both GPTC (Routes R1 and R4) and North Township Dial-a-Ride provide service to the general public in this area. However, Route R1 is only scheduled to operate every 120 minutes (2 hours) and R4 is not currently operating due to a shortage of serviceable buses. In East Chicago there is also overlap between GPTC R1 and ECT routes, but the service patterns are different. It is important to note that the basic fare on GPTC R1 is \$2.25 (\$1 for reduced fare riders) while both the North Township Dial-a-Ride and East Chicago Transit charge no fares.

C. Service Gaps

Figure 13 indicates high and very high transit demand areas that are not served by fixed route service. Whiting, despite being close to the Gary and East Chicago transit systems, is isolated from a fixed route service. LaPorte also has very high transit demand near downtown but is only served by demand response service (TransPorte) and not fixed route. Since TransPorte only serves LaPorte, these residents are unable to use transit to travel across the region. Whiting is served by North Township Dial-a-Ride, which covers a much greater area and has the potential to connect residents to regional transit services like the South Shore Line which has a station in nearby East Chicago. However, riding a demand response service versus a fixed route service is often times more daunting for a rider and takes additional effort, causing it to only be used by the most transit dependent populations. The need to schedule the service 24 to 48 hours ahead of time, and the fact that often times only certain types of trips can be honored, proves to be less attractive for non-transit dependent riders.

Two high transit demand areas are unserved by any form of public transportation: one on the east side of Downtown Crown Point and the block group that includes The Lakes at 8201 Apartment Homes in Merrillville.

There are other transit dependent areas without fixed route service as indicated on *Figure 13*.

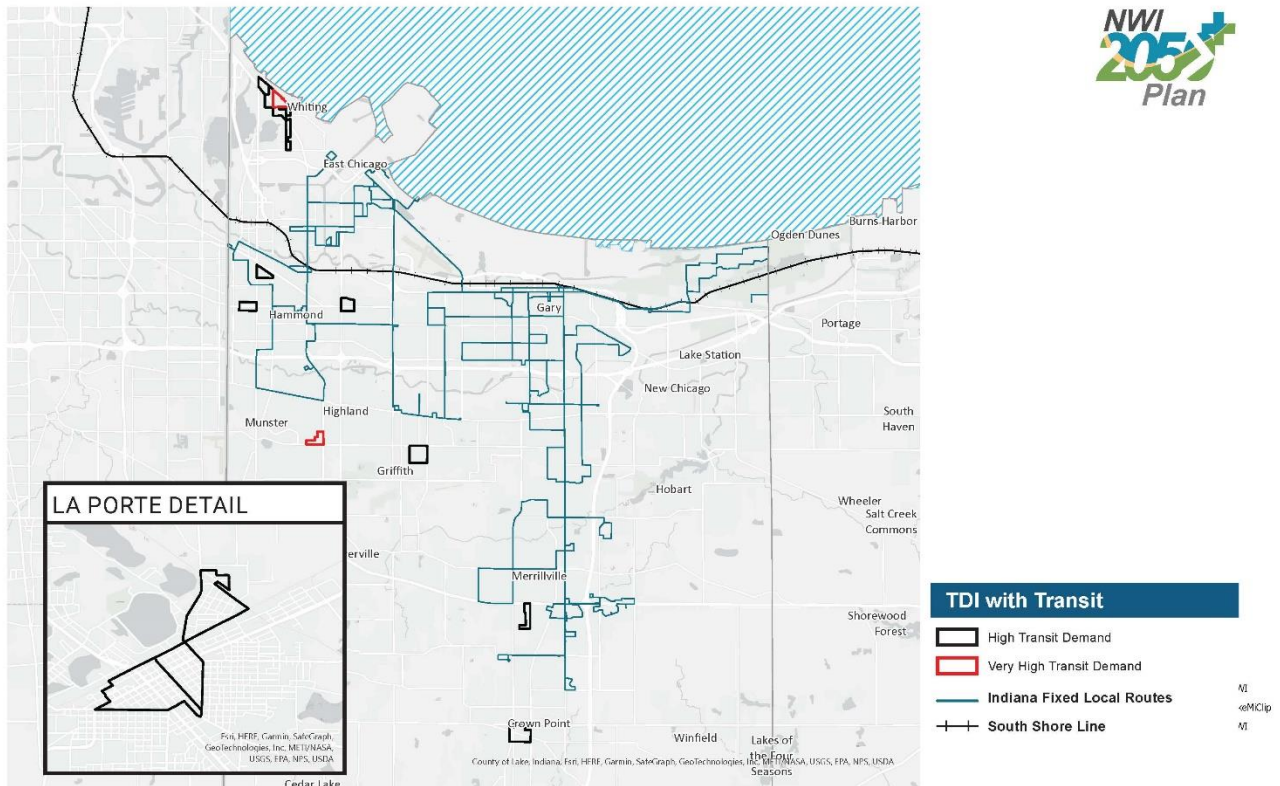


Figure 13: Unserved High Transit Demand Areas (Fixed Route Only)

D. Service Coverage

Approximately 15 percent of the land area of the NIRPC region is covered by public transportation as shown in Figure 14, either fixed route or demand response service open to the general public. About three quarters of NIRPC region residents live in this area and about the same percentage of all jobs in the region are located there⁴. Connections can be made via fixed route service in Hammond to Pace service; express routes (ChicagoDash) connect NIRPC residents to Downtown Chicago and to the CTA bus and rail routes. The South Shore line shares six stations in Chicago with Metra, allowing cross platform transfers as necessary.

⁴ Exact numbers: 71 percent of the population and 72 percent of the jobs

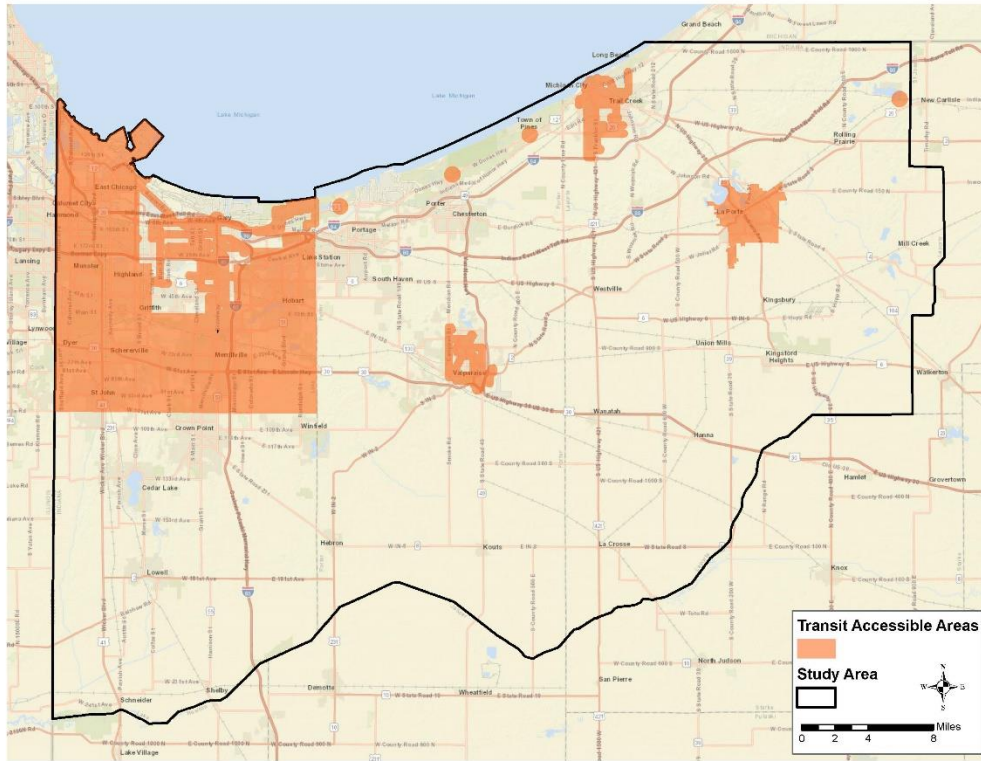


Figure 14: Access to Transit in the Study Area

Almost all of the cities⁵ in Northwest Indiana are served by fixed route transit, the exceptions being Portage and LaPorte (see Table 5). However, only a minority of towns (all other incorporated communities) are served.

Table 5: Service Coverage of Municipalities

	Number	Served	% Served
Cities	11	9	82%
Towns	30	6	20%

As Table 6 indicates very few hospitals are served; with the relocation of urban hospitals to rural areas, this is not surprising. Other destinations not served on this list include the Horseshoe Casino in Hammond and the Westville campus of Purdue University.

Table 6: Major Destinations Served

	Number	Served	% Served
Universities and Colleges	10	8	80%
Hospitals	18	6	33%
Casinos	4	3	75%

⁵ Communities over 30,000 residents

Service coverage was also examined in a different way; i.e. what percentage of arterial/major roads have fixed route buses on them. There is an estimated 1,041 miles of arterial roadways in Northwest Indiana; 63 miles or 6% have fixed route bus service operating on them. Since most arterial road⁶ miles are in rural parts of the study area, few of these road miles are served by fixed route transit.

E. Attractiveness of Service to Non-Transit Dependent Riders

Public transportation competes with the automobile, most commonly owned by individuals or families, but also taking the form of taxis or ride-hailing services (i.e., Uber or Lyft). In the NIRPC region, the public transportation service that is most competitive with the automobile is the South Shore Line (SSL/NICTD) which operates fast, frequent service and allows passengers to avoid the high cost of parking in Downtown Chicago. Valparaiso's ChicagoDash express bus service to Downtown Chicago has similar attributes but it only operates during weekday peak periods.

Most public transportation in the district is local bus service, with buses stopping at corners along the route. Most bus stops in Northwest Indiana are not marked with bus stop signs. The primary source of information regarding bus routes, stops, schedules, and fares are the websites of the operating agencies. There is no comprehensive website, there are few instances of links to the websites of other agencies, and they are inconsistent as to how comprehensive, or current, the posted information is. The lack of coordination regarding information and transfer opportunities between systems can be a detriment to attracting riders who want to ride regionally.

In addition, some routes are not as attractive if they cause the rider to travel for a long period of time to get to a destination. A number of local bus routes in the region include long, broad loops operated in a single direction which means that riders traveling to/from stops near the start or end of the loop will need to ride a long amount of time and distance to or from their stop in one direction.

Fares on most systems have been held at low levels (\$1.00 adult full fares, with 50¢ reduced fares are common). GPTC fares are \$1.60 for full fares for riders within Gary (80¢ for reduced fares) and \$2.25 on regional routes (\$1.00 for reduced fares), regardless of the length the rider's trip. However, even with low fares, local bus service, particularly on routes with broad loops or service that comes every hour or less frequently is not competitive for riders with the means to own an automobile, borrow one, use uber or Lyft, or are able to get a ride from a friend or family member.

F. Stakeholder Meetings

A series of stakeholder meetings with transit operating agencies and other stakeholders were held in May and June 2022. The transit operating agencies were asked to identify the gaps that they perceived based on input from riders or their knowledge of destinations in or near their operating areas. The potential destinations that they identified as gaps in current service or areas for enhanced service are detailed below.

⁶ Arterial roads in this context are non-limited access highways with a state or united states route designation

East Chicago Transit (ECT)

- Whiting
- Proposed senior center at Main Street/Martin Luther King Drive/Guthrie Street

Gary Public Transit Corporation (GPTC)

- New/enhanced connections to new West Lake Corridor/Hammond Station
- Proposed Lakeshore North Route (planned but not funded)
- Better service to Schererville/Ridgeville
- Better service to Merrillville
- Service to Hobart (planned)
- Calumet College in Hammond
- Better service in the Hammond area and the northwest corner of the NIRPC region, i.e., Whiting
- Porter County (outside their operating boundaries)
- Better service to Pace connections in Hammond

City of Hammond

- New/enhanced connections to new West Lake Corridor/Hammond Station
- Enhanced connections to Purdue University NW
- New service between Robertsdale and Whiting neighborhoods
- New/enhanced service in Hessville neighborhood

Lake County Community Services (LCCS)

- Requests to serve doctors/hospitals in Illinois, municipality of Lafayette, and North Township

TransPorte

- New service between LaPorte and Michigan City
- Expansion of service boundaries to serve unincorporated LaPorte – schools and businesses

Michigan City Transit (MCT)

- New service between Michigan City and LaPorte
- New service between Michigan City and Westville
- New service along US 421
- New service along IN-212
- New service to municipalities outside of Michigan City limits
- New service to Weatherstone Village (mobile home park)

NITCD/South Shore Line

- Better coordination with transit providers serving station areas
- Long term goal by NITCD/South Shore Line is to extend the West Lake Corridor line further south, and also eventually creating a diagonal branch off the mainline to the southeast to serve Valparaiso

Union Township

- Although there is no transit service operating within Union Township, there are plans to expand Willow Creek Road to US 30 so expect future population/employment growth
- Future connections to Valparaiso and Hobart

Valpo Transit

- Northwest Health (Porter) in Chesterton
- Porter County Expo Center
- New service to Gary and LaPorte
- Chicago Dash stop in Hobart

G. Transit Steering Committee Meeting

A Transit Steering Committee Meeting was held on Tuesday, June 28, 2022. Members of the Transit Steering Committee are listed in *Appendix C*. A presentation showing existing transit and transit demand was presented and Steering Committee members were asked to identify gaps and needs. Input received from the various operating agencies has been included above under the respective transit agencies.

In addition to input received by the transit agencies, NIRPC indicated that there are four themes as part of NIRPC's focus for improved transit in the region. This includes:

- A need for rail service to Valparaiso
- Better bus/rail connections
- Better connections across the Illinois State line
- Better connections between the 41 cities and towns in the NIRPC region

Steering Committee members shared concerns about barriers to implementing improvements. These barriers include funding, staff shortages (notably bus drivers), bus rolling stock shortages, maintenance, or age issues, and operating boundary restrictions. With regard to the bus rolling stock, buses are recently backordered and more expensive due to the impact of inflation and supply chain difficulties. There also is a concern about the transition to electric vehicles, with the lack of electric charging stations and the potential impact on operations.

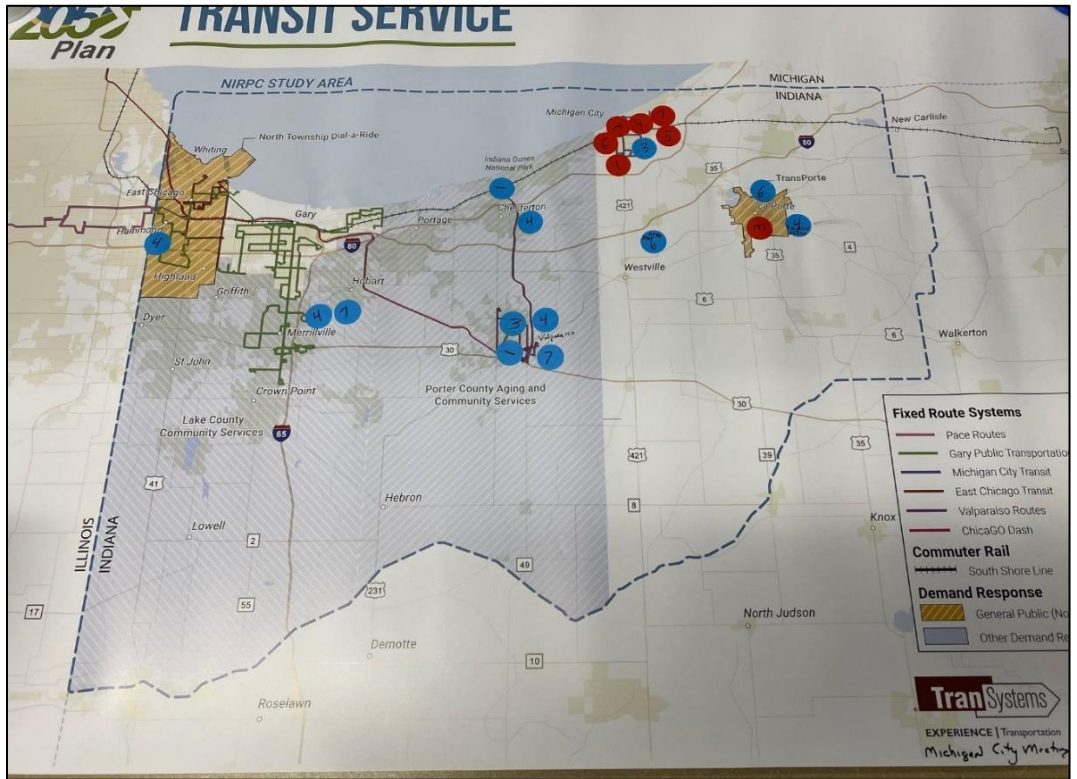
H. Public Meetings

Three public meetings were held during the week of June 20, 2022 to solicit feedback and encourage public engagement in NIRPC's 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update. All three meetings were held in an open house format, where attendees could arrive at any time between 4:00p.m. and 7:00 p.m. While information disseminated at the public meetings included several different elements of the MTP update (public transit, bike/pedestrian, freight), the following focuses on feedback from members of the public on the public transit element. Attendees at all three meetings were asked to participate in an interactive exercise to help identify gaps in existing transit service in Northwest Indiana and areas that they were interested in accessing with a future expansion of transit service.

1. Meeting #1 – Michigan City 6/21/22

The first public meeting for the 2050 MTP update was held at the Michigan City Public Library on Tuesday, June 21st. Approximately 20 members of the public attended the meeting. The photo of the interactive board below presents a summary of feedback received. Attendees placed red dots on the

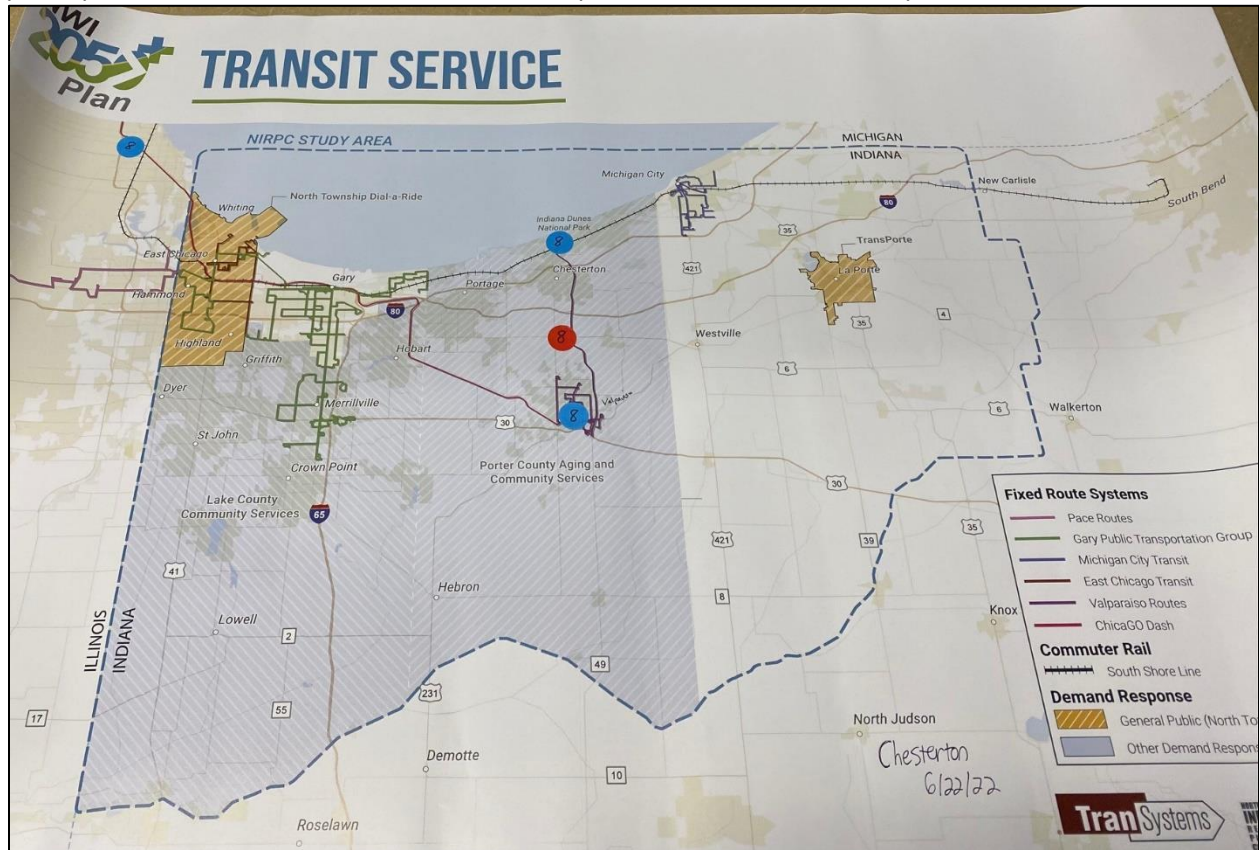
area that they lived, and blue dots on areas in the region that they wanted to access via public transit. As the first meeting was held in Michigan City, all but one participant in the exercise reported living in Michigan City. The greatest area of desired transit connection was Valparaiso. Several attendees also provided comments verbally that they had previously used Michigan City's "Transit Triangle" service, which provided connections between Michigan City, the Purdue NW Campus in Westville, and La Porte, enjoyed the service and were disappointed that the service was recently suspended. Several attendees also provided positive feedback on the ongoing South Shore Line Double Tracking project and the construction of a new South Shore Line 11th Street Station in Michigan City.



2. Meeting #2 – Chesterton 6/22/22

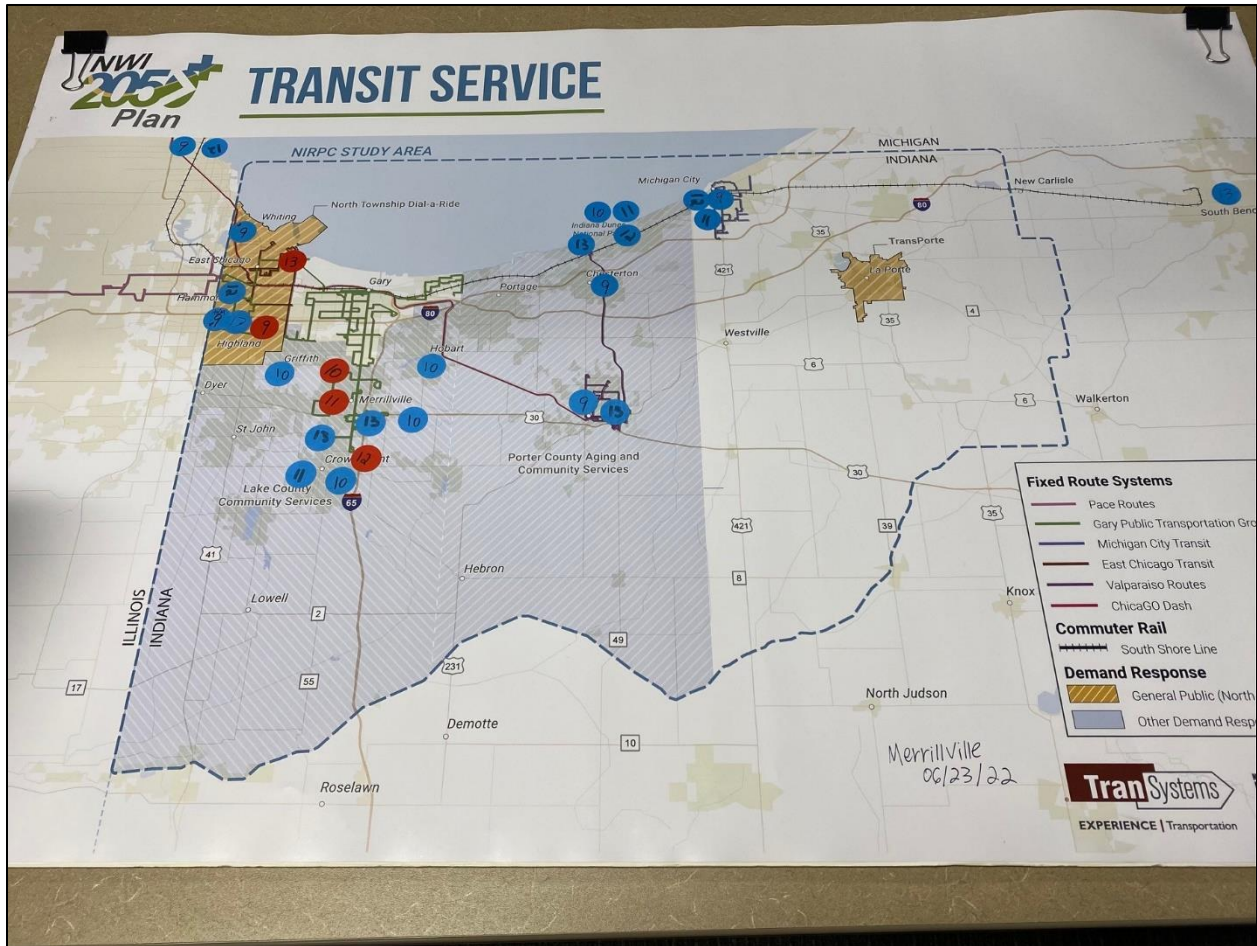
The second public meeting for the 2050 MTP update was held at the Chesterton Town Hall on Wednesday, June 22nd. Only two members of the public attended the meeting, and one person

participated in the interactive exercise, their responses can be found in the photo below.



3. Meeting #3 – Merrillville 6/23/22

The final public meeting for the 2050 MTP update was held at the Dean and Barbara White Community Center in Merrillville on Thursday, June 23rd. An estimated seven members of the public attended the meeting and five participated in the interactive exercise. Attendees reported living in East Chicago, Highland, Gary, Merrillville, and Crown Point. Desired transit connections expressed during the interactive exercise included the beach at the Indiana Dunes, Michigan City, Downtown Crown Point, and locations in the Hammond and Munster area. Several attendees at the meeting also provided comments verbally indicating a desire for greater economic development/transit-oriented development at South Shore Line train stations in the area, especially the Downtown Gary and East Chicago stations. A photo of responses to the interactive exercise to identify transit gaps and desired future service at the public meeting in Merrillville can be found below.



4. Summary

While feedback from the attendees at each of the meetings was primarily focused on improving transit connections near to where they live, several themes that can be applied to the entire NIRPC region emerged from comments received at the public meetings:

- A desire for enhanced regional transit connectivity – having the ability to use transit to conveniently access destinations throughout Northwest Indiana, not just within their municipality
- Greater economic development around existing transit hubs, especially existing South Shore Line stations
- Better integration and coordination, including schedules and fares, between different transit providers to make transfers more efficient
- Better amenities at transit stops such as bus shelters

I. Public Survey

A public survey was available on the NIRPC website during the months of July and August 2022 to allow for feedback to formulate the MTP vision. The following input specific to transit has been received as of this report:

- A bus line to connect with the V-Line from Crown Point, Winfield, and Valparaiso
- MCT schedules don't match the South Shore Line schedules; bus service does not start early enough or late enough to connect with the South Shore Line. There needs to be more integration with transit operators.
- Not easy to get to the South Shore Line from Porter or Chesterton; a shuttle service or bus line would help
- A bus route from Porter/Chesterton to Michigan City and/or Valparaiso could alleviate some congestion on Routes 49 and 20 and provide connections to entertainment options
- Willow Creek Boulevard is a good candidate for bus rapid transit with limited stops connecting the Ogden Dunes Station with Portage and Downtown Hobart
- Central Avenue is a good candidate for Bus Rapid Transit with limited stops linking Gary, New Chicago, Lake Station, and Portage
- Consider potential for light rail transit along Broadway linking Downtown Gary with the Indiana University NW campus, a distance of about 3 miles; could help revitalize the corridor
- US 30 should have bus rapid transit with limited stops linking Joliet, IL with Valparaiso, IN with stops in Dyer, Merrillville and Hobart
- Ridge Road is a great candidate for Bus Rapid Transit with limited stops linking Lansing, IL with Munster, Highland, Griffith, Gary, Hobart, and Portage (and the West Lake Corridor)
- Indianapolis Boulevard is a great candidate for Bus Rapid Transit with limited stops linking Whiting/East Chicago, Hammond, Munster, and Dyers
- Need high speed rail linking Chicago to Detroit with stops in Gary and Michigan City
- Need high speed rail linking Chicago to Indianapolis with a stop in Gary or Hammond
- Light rail connecting Whiting, Hammond, Highland and Merrillville

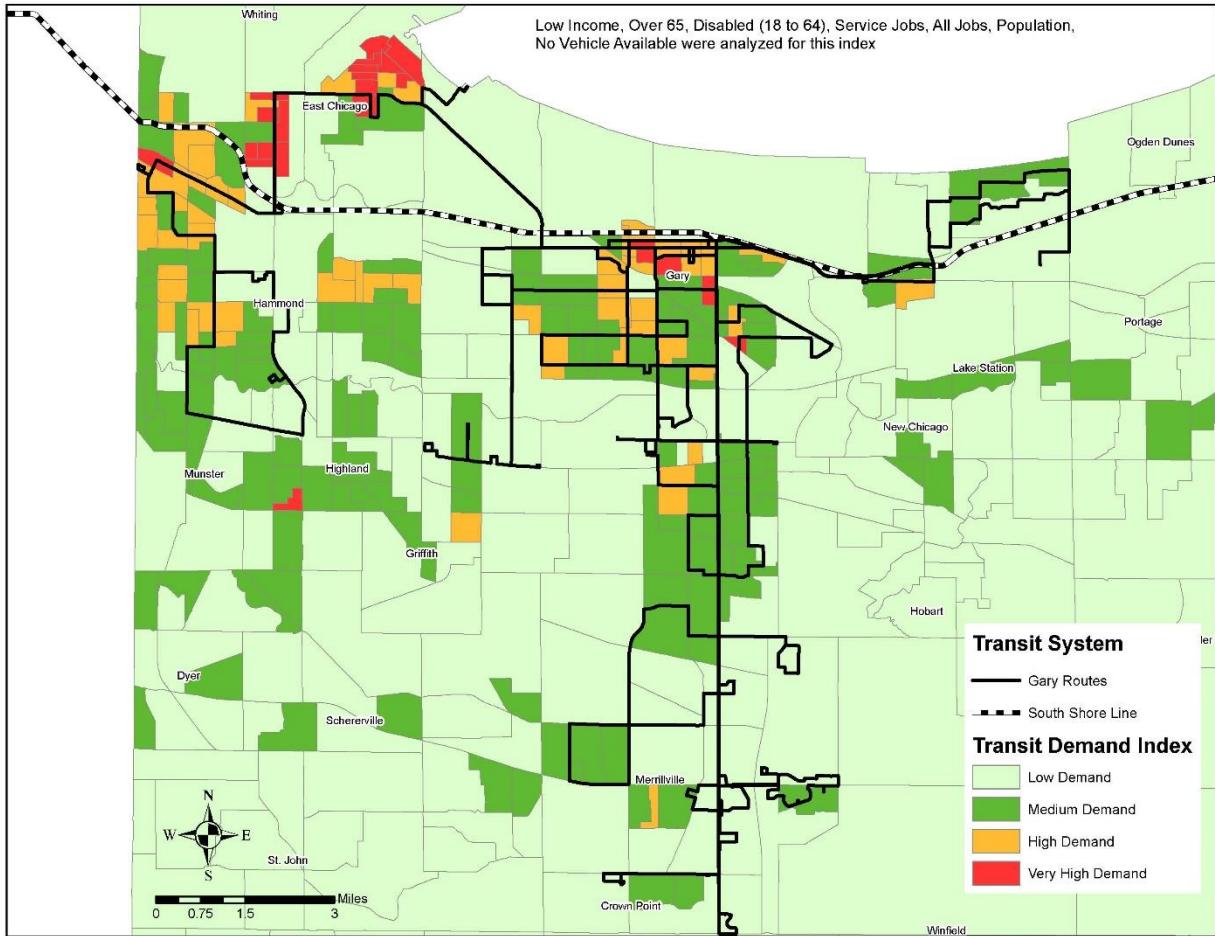
IV. Next Step – Creating Purpose

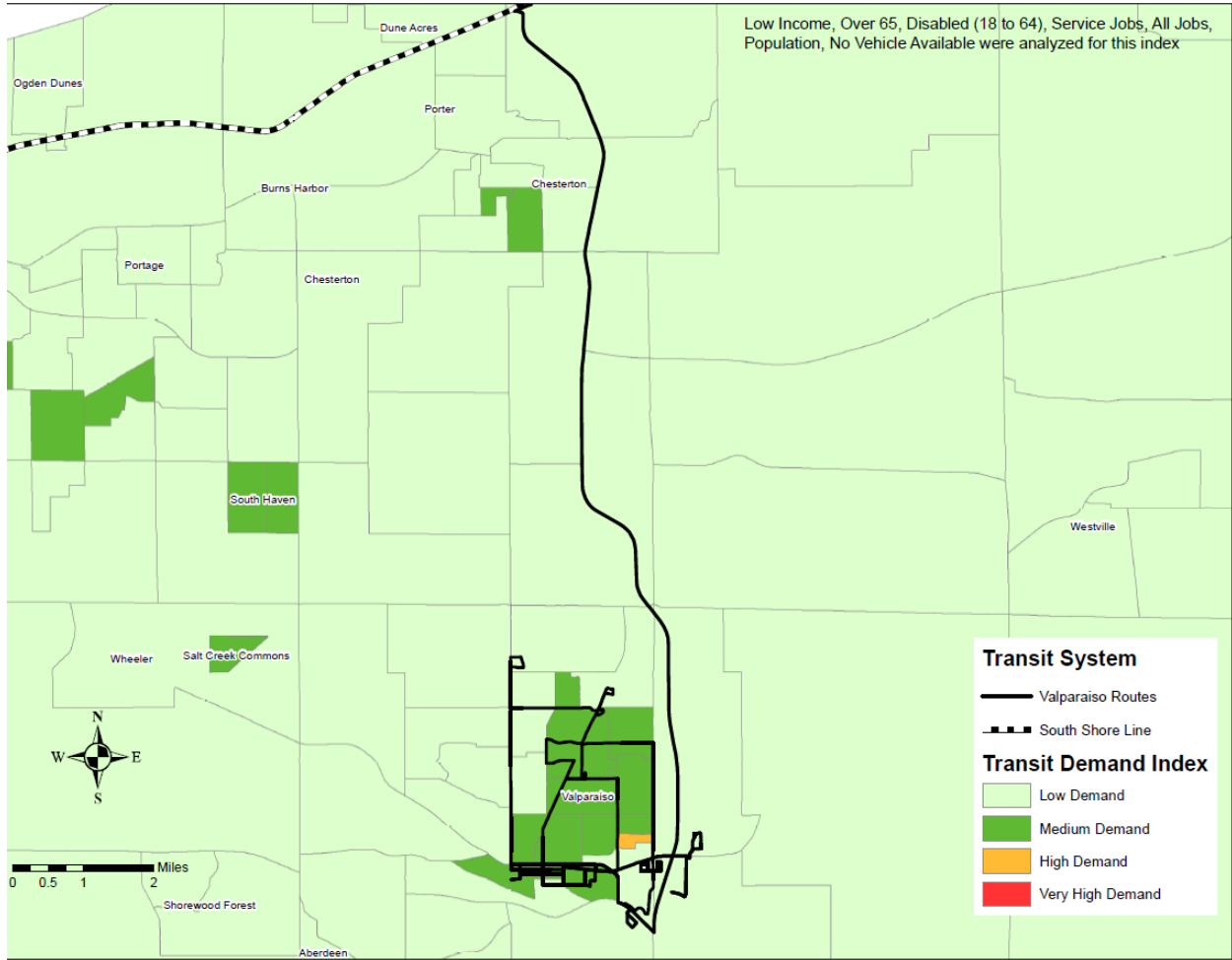
In the Creating Purpose phase of the study, the gaps and needs identified in this Finding Meaning Report will be used to develop potential future service ideas. Most of the bus service is provided by municipally-based agencies; however, development and travel trends are not limited by municipal boundaries so how best to accommodate more regional trips, including trips across state lines will be explored.

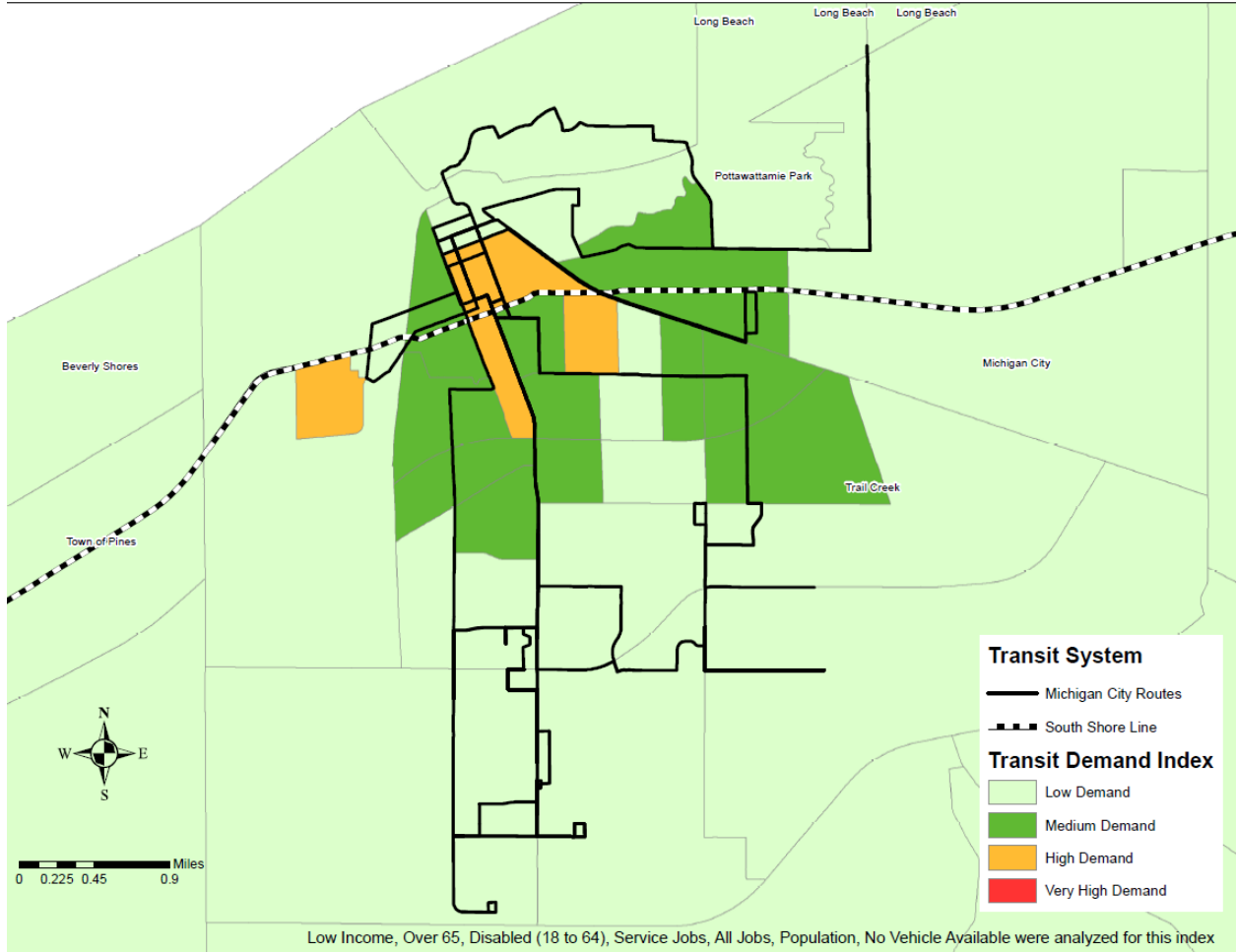
Concepts for regional bus services and better intra-regional transit service by taking advantage of the more frequent, consistent, and faster South Shore Line service and the new West Lake Corridor project will be developed.

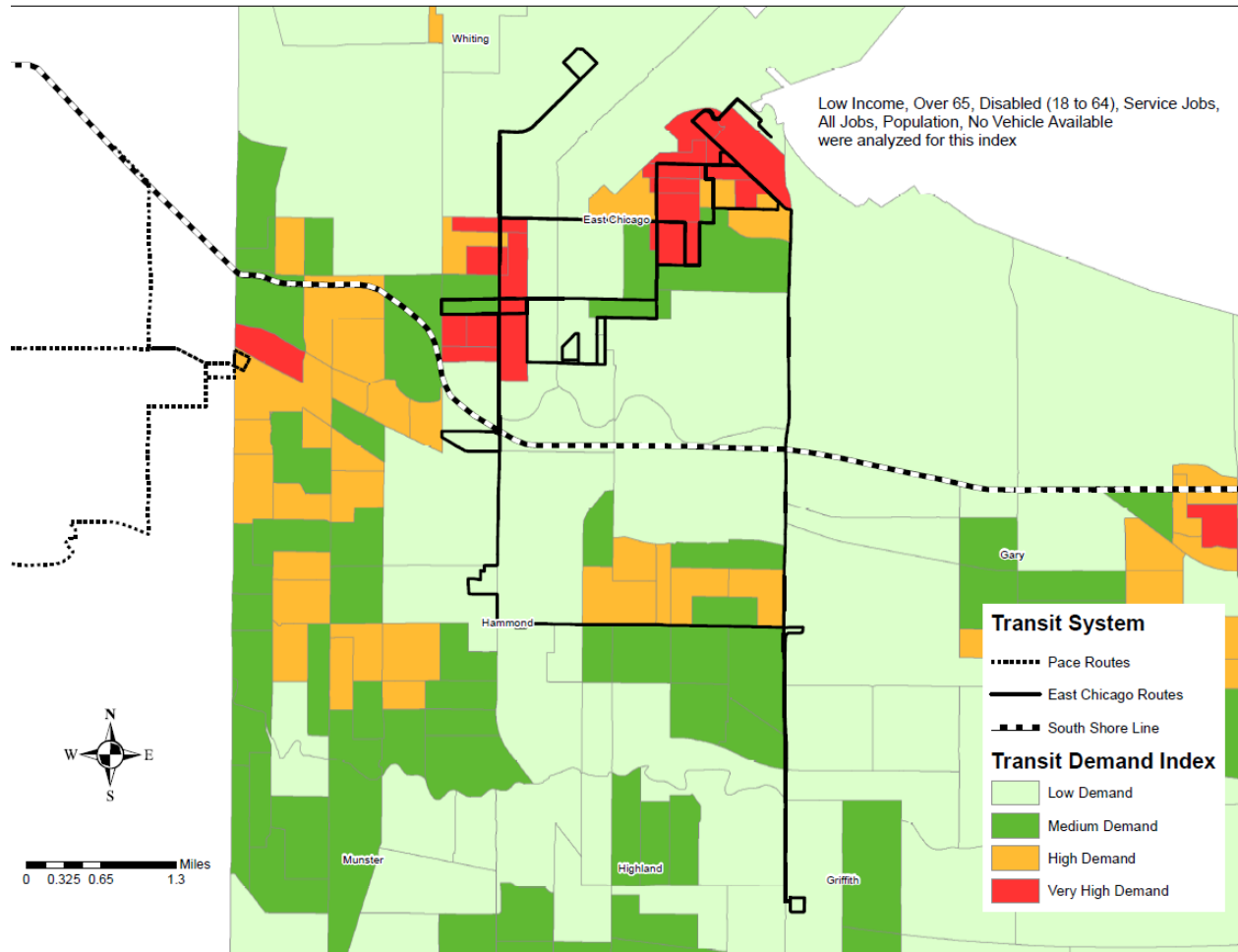
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Appendix A - Closeup Transit Demand Index Maps

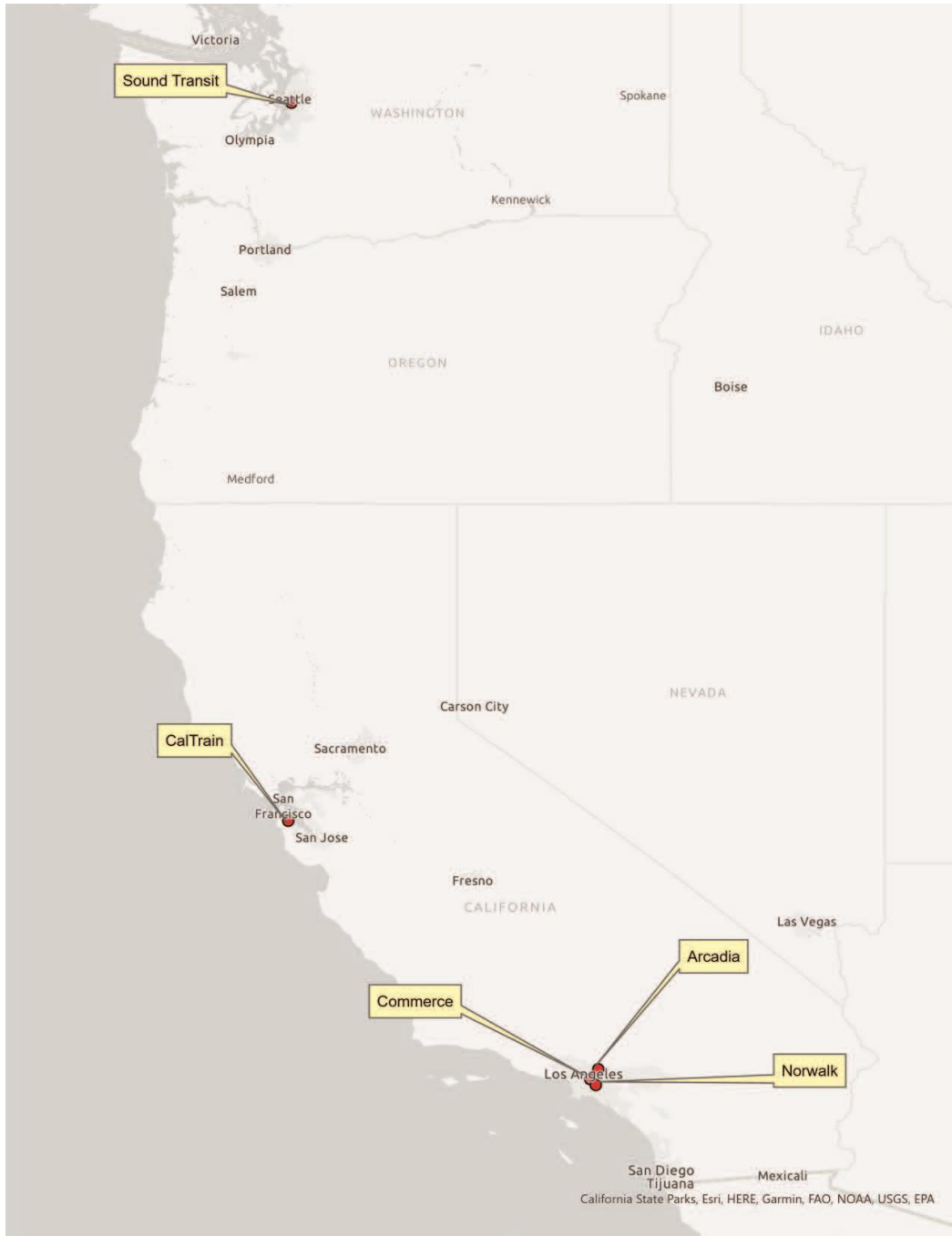








Appendix B – Peer Transit Agencies⁷



West Coast Peers

⁷ Peer agencies chosen by demographic similarity and population size; these maps show all of the peers of the various Northwest Indiana transit agency



East Coast Peers

DR

Appendix C - Transit Steering Committee Members

East Chicago Transit (ECT)	Frank Rosado
Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC)	David Wright
City of Hammond	Tom Novak
City of Hobart	Ross Pietrzak
Lake County Community Services	Blossom Mabon
City of Merrillville	Steve King
Michigan City Transit (MCT)	Robin Tillman
NICTD	Kelly Wenger
North Township Dial-a-Ride	Dianna DeLeon
Portage	AJ Monroe
Porter County Aging and Community Services	Bruce Lindner
Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)	Peter Kersten
TransPorte	Beth West
Union Township	George Topoll
Valpo Transit	Donald Lorentzen