

2027 MTP UPDATE REGIONAL PROFILE AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

1-INTRODUCTION

THE NIRPC REGION

The NIRPC region encompasses the three northwesternmost counties in Indiana: Lake, Porter, and La Porte. All three counties lie along the southern shore of Lake Michigan and together include all 45 miles of Indiana’s Lake Michigan shoreline. The region borders two other states: Illinois on the west and Michigan on the northeast. The southern border generally follows the Kankakee River, a highly channelized waterway that extends from St. Joseph County, Indiana into Illinois. Northwest Indiana is home to 791,955 people (2025 Census estimate) and covers 1,520 square miles. It contains forty-one cities and towns. The entirety of the region is within the Chicago metropolitan area, the third largest metropolitan area in the United States.

The region contains a wide range of land uses and development types. The northern portion, most notably northern Lake County, contains dense urban centers and heavy industrial facilities, including multiple large steel mills and the largest oil refinery in the Midwest. Industry begins to taper off to the east and is replaced by small and medium-sized communities separated by some of the most biodiverse natural areas in the country, many acres of which are protected in the Indiana Dunes National Park, the Indiana Dunes State Park, and other smaller preserves. A swath of stable and growing suburban communities extends from the Illinois state line through central and southern Lake County into northern and central Porter County, following the Interstates 80/94 and 90 and US 30. The remainder of the region to the southeast is predominantly rural and agricultural.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report includes a profile of the region and a description of regional performance. These are integrated into sections on Demographics, Active Transportation, Land Use & Housing, Climate & Environment, Highways and Roads, Freight, and Transit.

The regional profile describes the existing conditions and data relevant to the metropolitan planning process. These include the “latest available estimates and assumptions for population, land use, travel, employment, congestion, and economic activity” as well as existing transportation facilities including “major roadways, public transportation facilities, intercity bus facilities, multimodal and intermodal facilities, nonmotorized transportation facilities (e.g., pedestrian walkways and bicycle facilities), and intermodal connectors)” as outlined in CFR § 450.324.

The regional performance component is used to benchmark progress and evaluate whether we are achieving our goals as a region. It includes both the federally required transportation performance measures and targets that will comprise the system performance report of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), along with locally developed performance measures that were included in NIRPC’s 2019 *NWI 2050* Long Range Transportation Plan and the 2023 *NWI 2050+ MTP*, as well as new measures that have been identified in this plan update.

NIRPC'S PLANNING AREA

In addition to serving as the state-designated regional planning agency for Northwest Indiana and regional Council of Governments, NIRPC is a federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). To receive federal transportation funding, local governments within urban areas with populations greater than 50,000 are required by federal law to form an MPO to conduct a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process.

MPOs, together with the State, determine the area boundary for their planning and programming activities, which is called their Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). In accordance with CFR 450.312, the MPA must encompass, at a minimum, the existing urbanized area as defined by the most recent Census and the contiguous area(s) likely to become urbanized within the next 20 years. An MPO is responsible for programming transportation funding for projects on the federal aid network and other eligible facilities anywhere within that MPA.

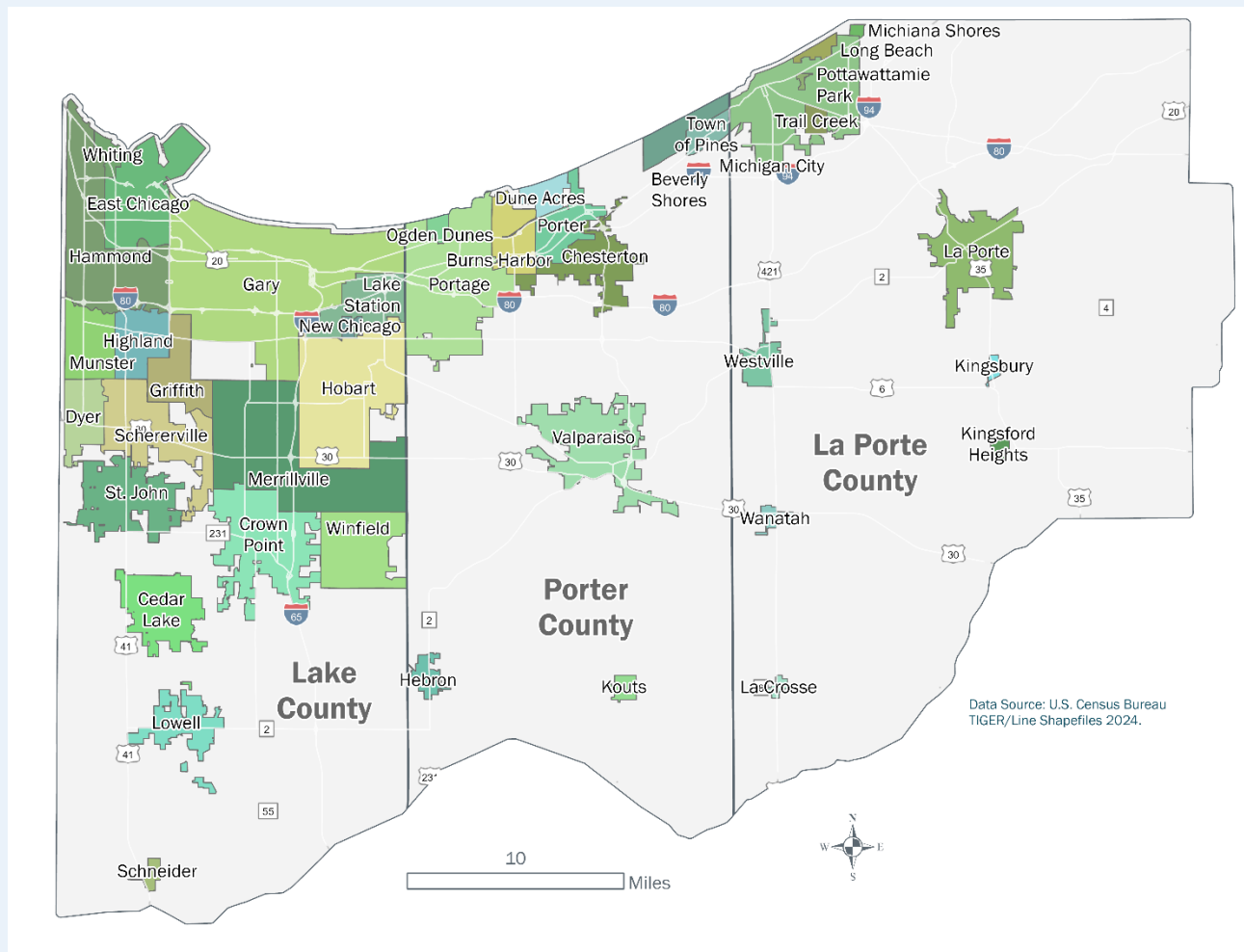


Figure 1-1: The NIRPC Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) - Lake, Porter & La Porte counties

NIRPC's MPA includes the entirety of Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties, allowing NIRPC to conduct planning activities and fund transportation projects throughout the three-county region. The MPA includes three large urban areas for which NIRPC is the designated MPO: the Indiana portion of the Chicago, IL-IN,

urban area, which extends around the shore of Lake Michigan and covers the northern half of Lake County and the northwest corner of Porter County; the Indiana portion of the Michigan City-La Porte, IN-MI urban area, which encompasses the incorporated areas of Michigan City and La Porte, along with some adjacent unincorporated residential areas; and the Valparaiso-Shorewood Forest urban area, which was recently created when a large portion of the Chicago urban area in central Porter County was redesignated as a separate urban area. For transportation planning purposes, States and MPOs also have the option to adjust the Census-designated urban areas to create smooth and slightly larger boundaries recognized by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

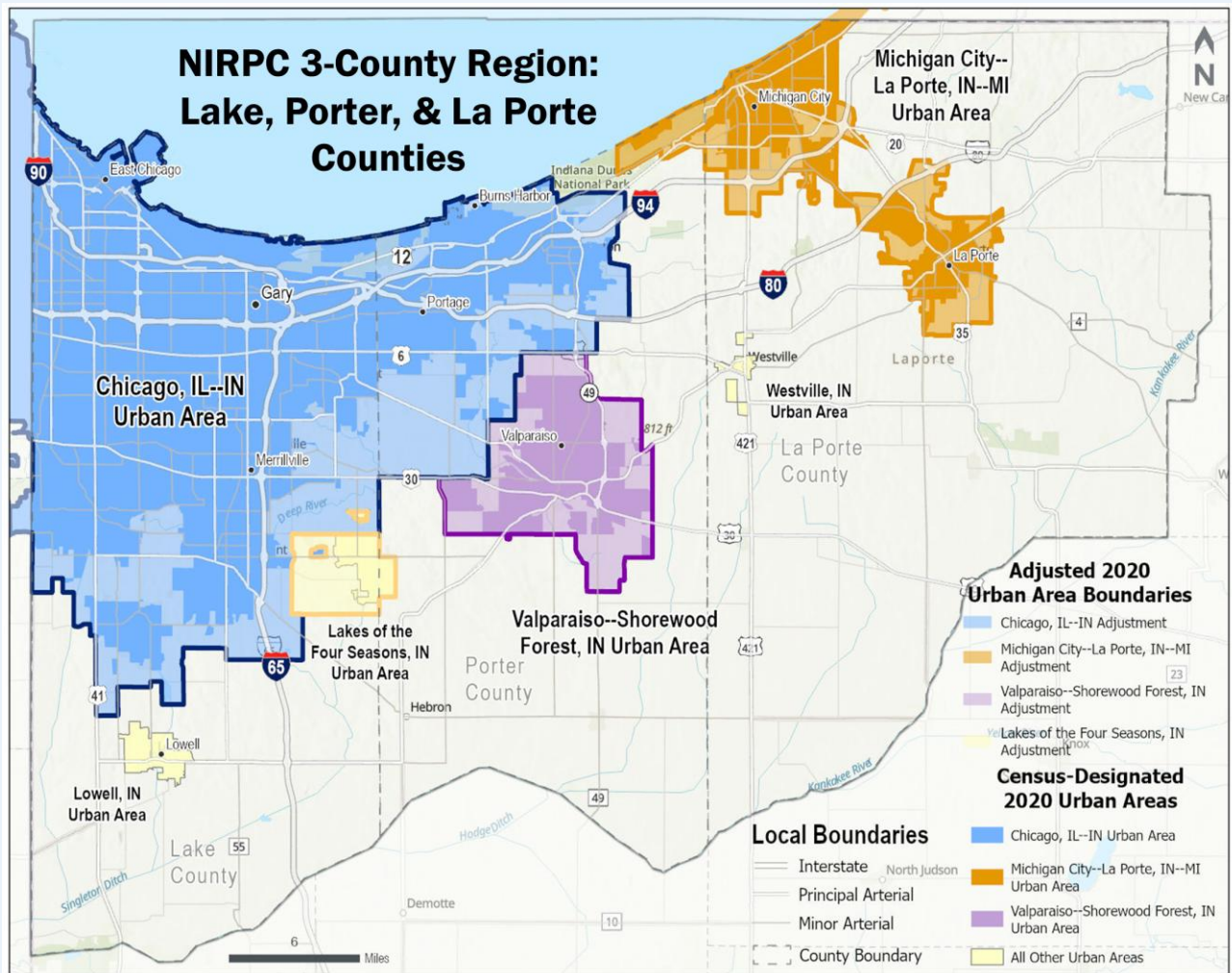


Figure 1-2: The 2020 U.S. Census Designated Urban Areas and Adjusted Boundaries

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

NORTHWEST INDIANA POPULATION GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION

A comparison of the regional population from 1990 to 2024 shows how Northwest Indiana has changed over time. Using the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates, Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties had an estimated population of 713,000 in 1990. By 2024, the population had risen to approximately 790,000, an increase of about 10%. During this time, the region gained an average of roughly 2,250 residents per year, though growth varied over time. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, the population increased steadily but then only rose slightly throughout the early 2010s.

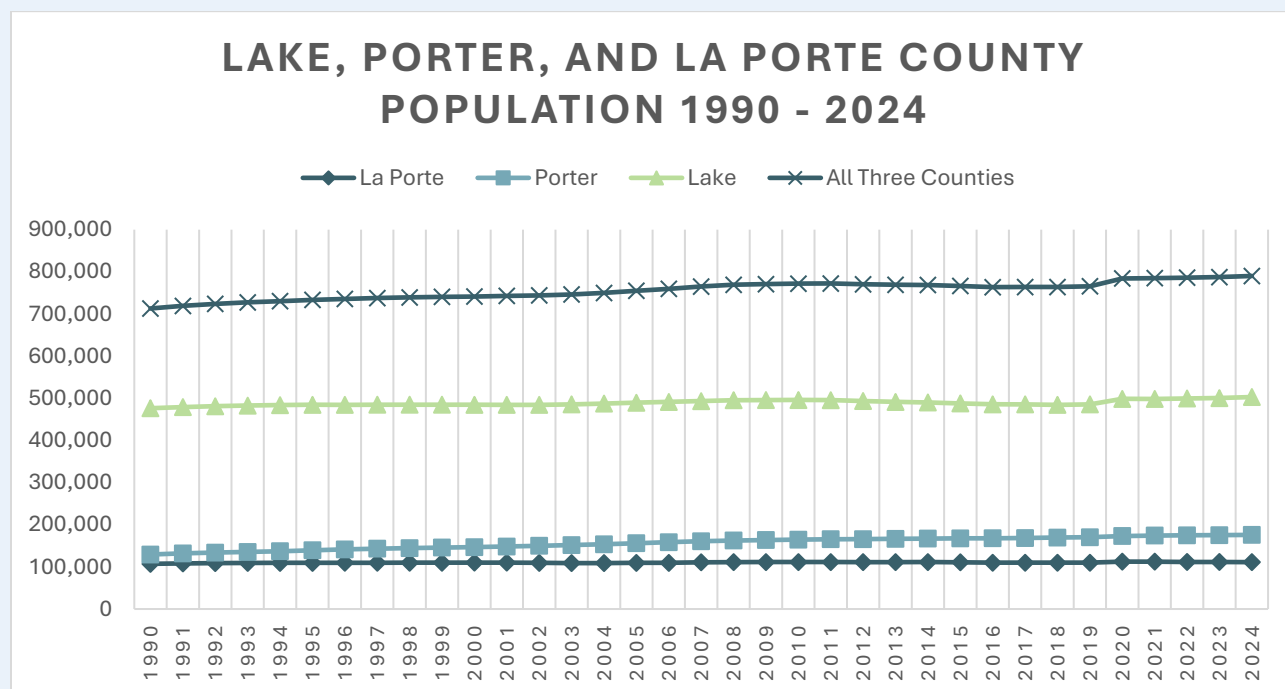


Figure 1-3: Population Change from 1990 to 2024 for Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties

Overall, from 1990 to 2024, population growth has been low to moderate in both Lake and LaPorte counties which have maintained their populations within +/- 5% of their 1990 levels. By contrast, Porter County had a population of approximately 129,000 people in 1990, compared to 175,000 people in 2024, an almost 36% increase.

Due to the wide range of population growth/decline throughout Lake County from 2011 to 2017, mid-decade population estimates suggested Lake County was losing population based on the loss of residents in older industrial hubs in north Lake County. However, the 2020 Decennial Census, a direct headcount, revealed that the ACS estimates missed a major population surge in the late 2010s in growing suburban communities in southern Lake County. Figure 1-4 shows the region's total population in 2010 and 2020, compared to the most recent 2024 ACS 5-year estimated population. This comparison creates a more accurate picture of population dynamics in Northwest Indiana.

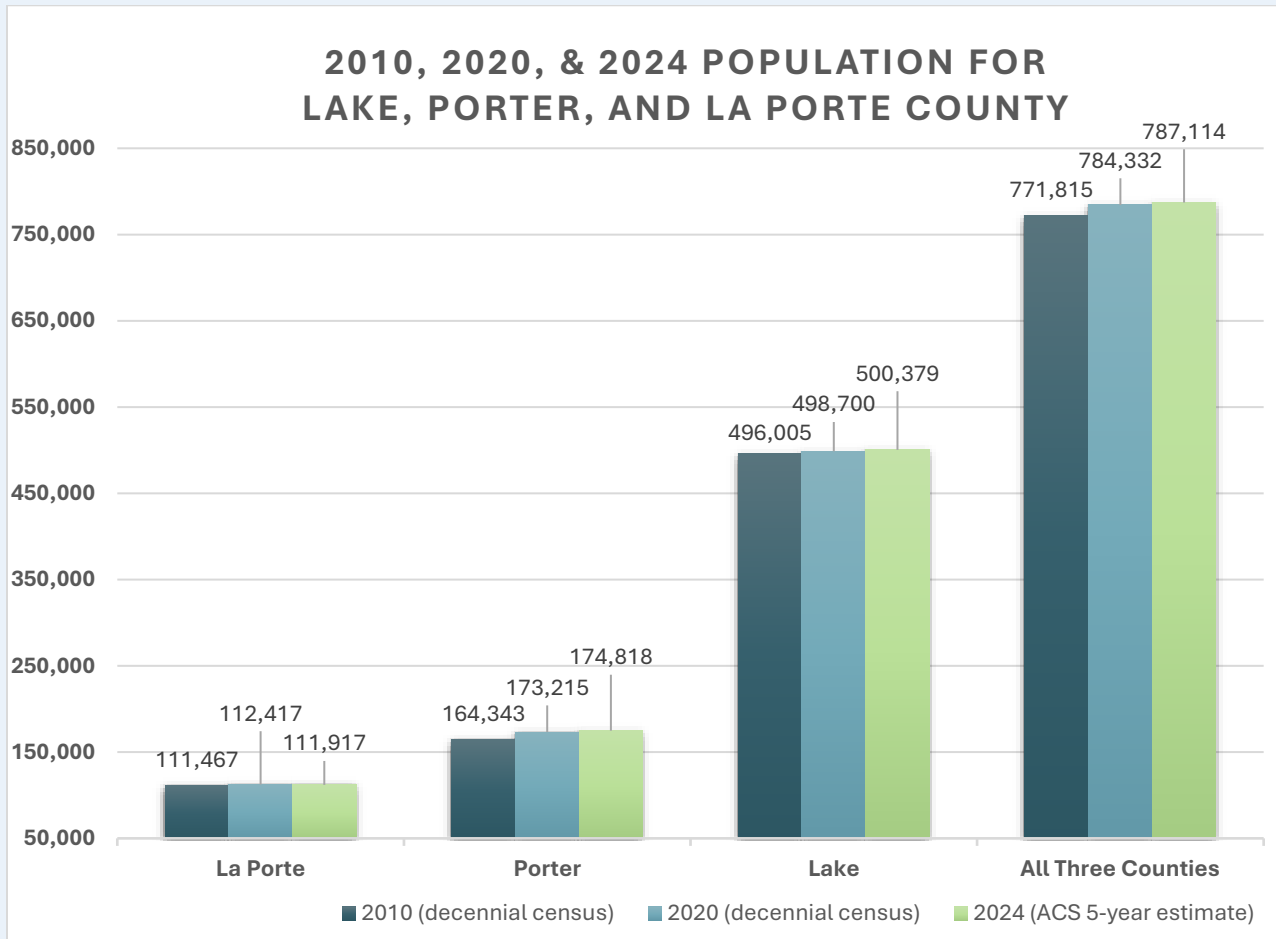


Figure 1-4: Population Change from 2020 to 2024 for Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties

A population pyramid is a tool used to visualize population distribution by age and gender. In 2024, the population pyramid for Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties indicates an aging population. This places Northwest Indiana in the contracting phase of the Demographic Transition Model, first described by Warren Thompson in 1929. Typical trends associated with this transition stage include low birth rates, resulting in fewer children, accompanied by low death rates, which causes the population to plateau. This phase is also associated with a high dependency ratio, which occurs when there are fewer working-aged people to support a growing number of older people. Healthier older populations with longer life expectancy and decreasing birth rates contribute to this dynamic. Additionally, the younger population has a comparable distribution of males to females, although the male population is consistently 1-2% larger than the female population. However, this dynamic shifts for the population 50 years and older, where females outnumber the male population by a range of 1 to 33%. This distribution is consistent with national and global trends, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, has reported that females outnumber males at older ages due to a combination of behavioral, lifestyle, and biological factors.

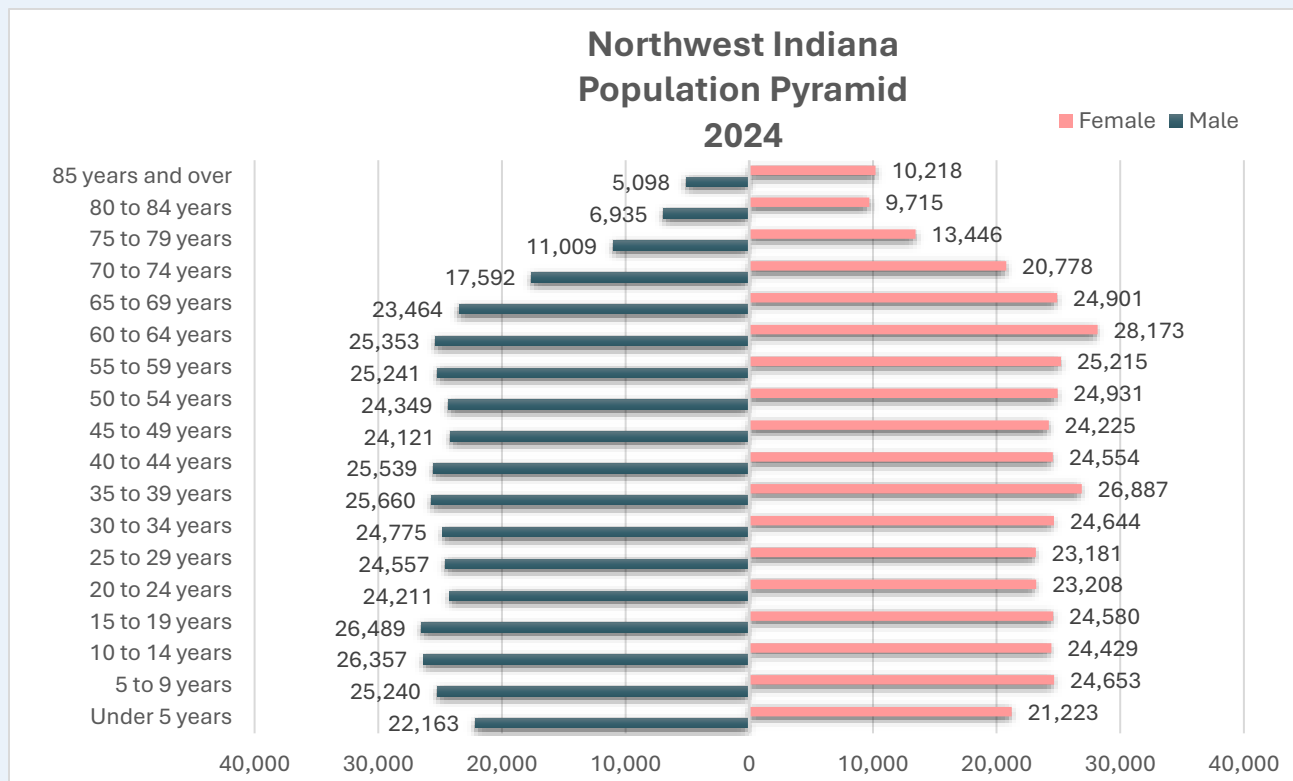


Figure 1-5: The 2024 Population Pyramid for Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties

Comparing population estimates between communities shows the relative size of communities and total number of residents. The median population of incorporated places in the U.S. is less than 5,000 people, meaning most cities and towns are relatively small. In Northwest Indiana, 23 out of the 41 incorporated places (56%) have a population of 5,000 or greater.

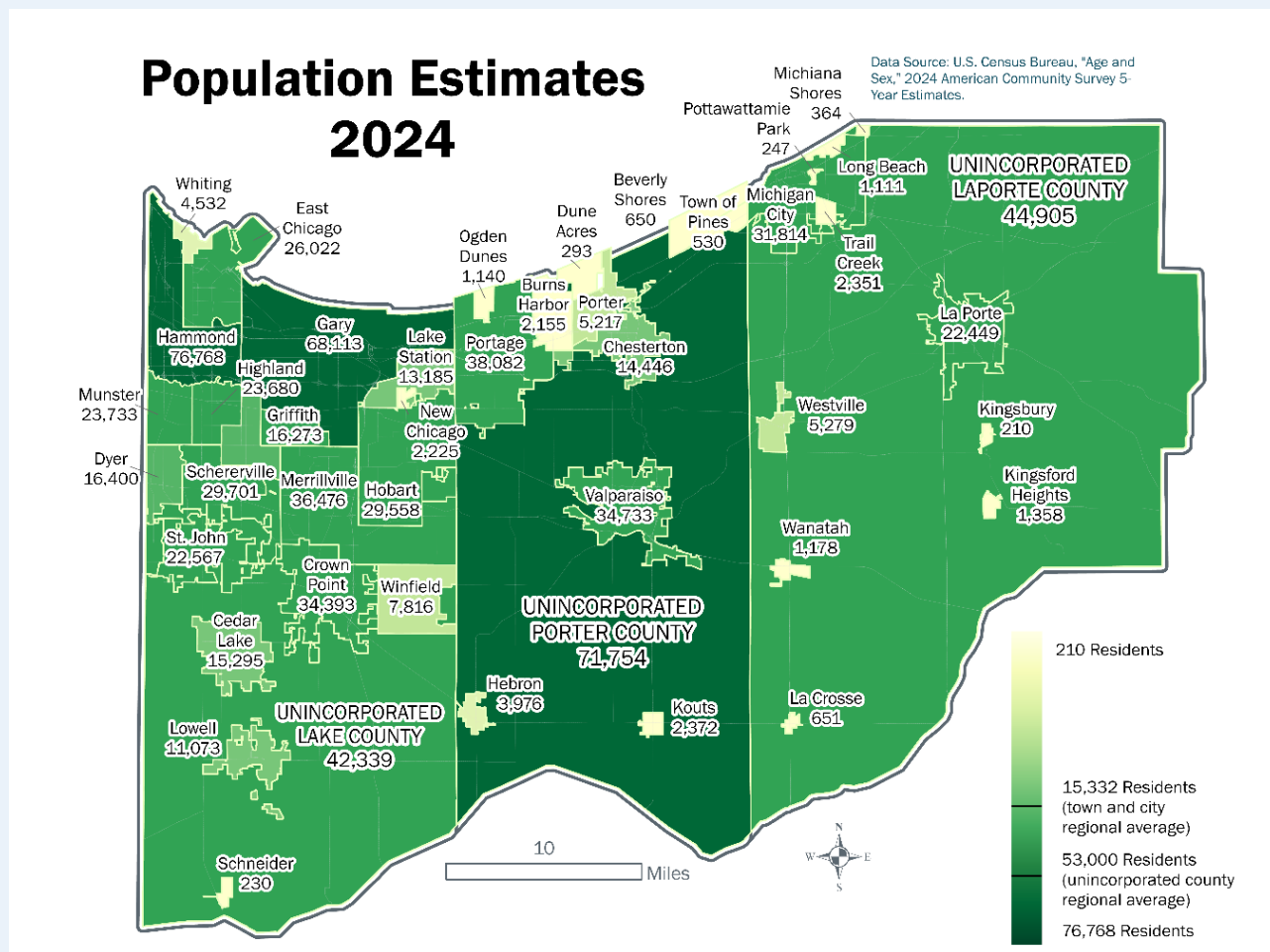


Figure 1-6: Northwest Indiana Population Estimates for Lake, Porter, and La Porte County

Figure 1-7 (below) shows the population density of Northwest Indiana by U.S. Census block groups. This map illustrates residential development patterns and the spatial distribution of people across the region. The areas with some of the highest population density include downtown La Porte, Michigan City, Valparaiso, Crown Point, Gary, and Whiting. High-density areas are also present in various neighborhoods throughout Hammond and East Chicago. Munster, Highland, and Griffith also experience higher than regional average population density between U.S. 6 (Ridge Rd.) and 45th St. Most of NIRPC's block groups have between 500 and 25,000 people per mile, with an average of 3,000 people per square mile. This is higher than the national average of 97 people per square mile, but much lower than the Chicago–Naperville–Elgin, IL–IN–WI Metropolitan Statistical Area, which has an average of 10,500 people per square mile and a range of 2,000 to just under 300,000 people per square mile.

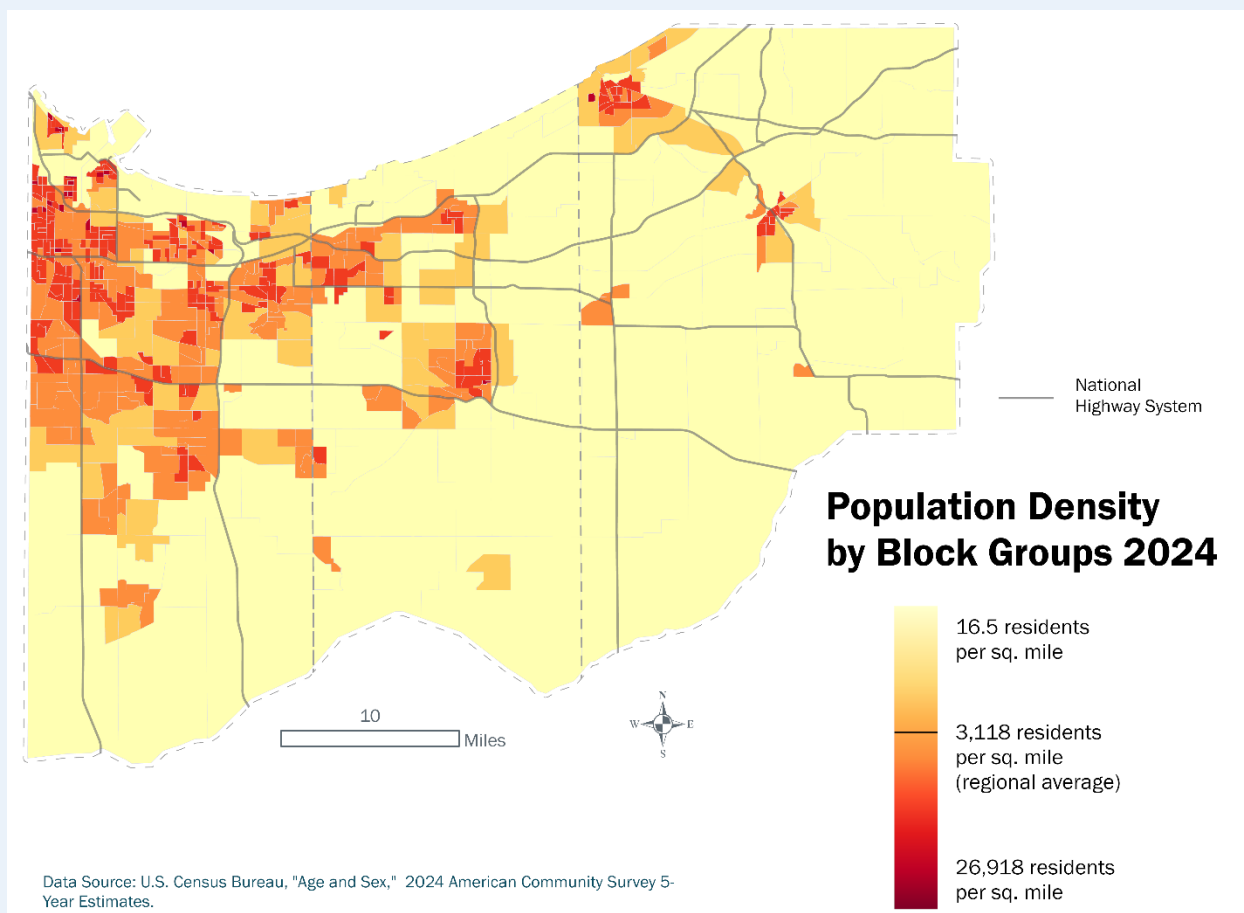


Figure 1-7: Population Density by U.S. Census Block Groups

NORTHWEST INDIANA POPULATION CHANGE

Comparing community population estimates in 2014 to community population estimates in 2024 showed that Kingsbury (-45%), Town of Pines (-28%), and Westville (-23%) had the greatest percentage of population loss, while Winfield (+60%), St. John (+46%), and Burns Harbor (+46%) had the greatest percentage of population gained. Using the percent change shows the rate of population change for a community. For example, a community with 0% change or near 0% would have no change in population from 2014 to 2024. However, a community that experienced a 100% change, or over 100% change, doubled, or more than doubled, in population.

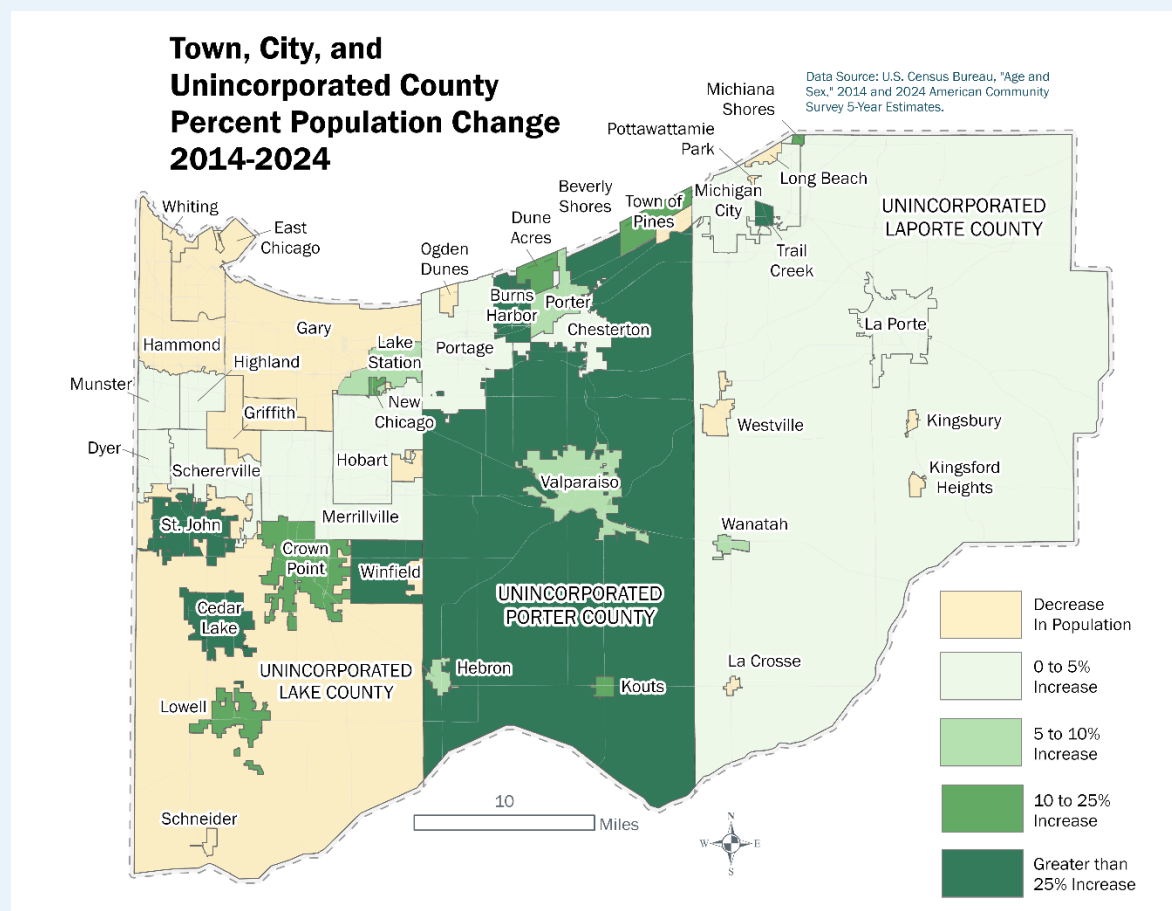


Figure 1-8: Percent Population Change for all places in

A high percentage population change can indicate significant and rapid transformation occurring in a community. But since it is sensitive to the size of the baseline population, that is not always the case. For instance, a small increase in a sparsely populated area yields a large percentage change, while a large numerical population increase in a highly populated area may result in an insignificant change.

In Gary, East Chicago, and Hammond, cities with total populations ranging from 25,000 to 75,000 people, the population decreased by about 3,000 to 11,000 people from 2014 to 2024. In contrast, St. John, Crown Point, and Cedar Lake, cities with roughly 15,000 to 35,000 people, had the largest increases in total population, gaining between 3,500 and 7,000 people. Although all six cities lost or gained roughly the same number of people, this number is a much larger fraction of the smaller cities' baseline size, resulting in a greater percentage change.

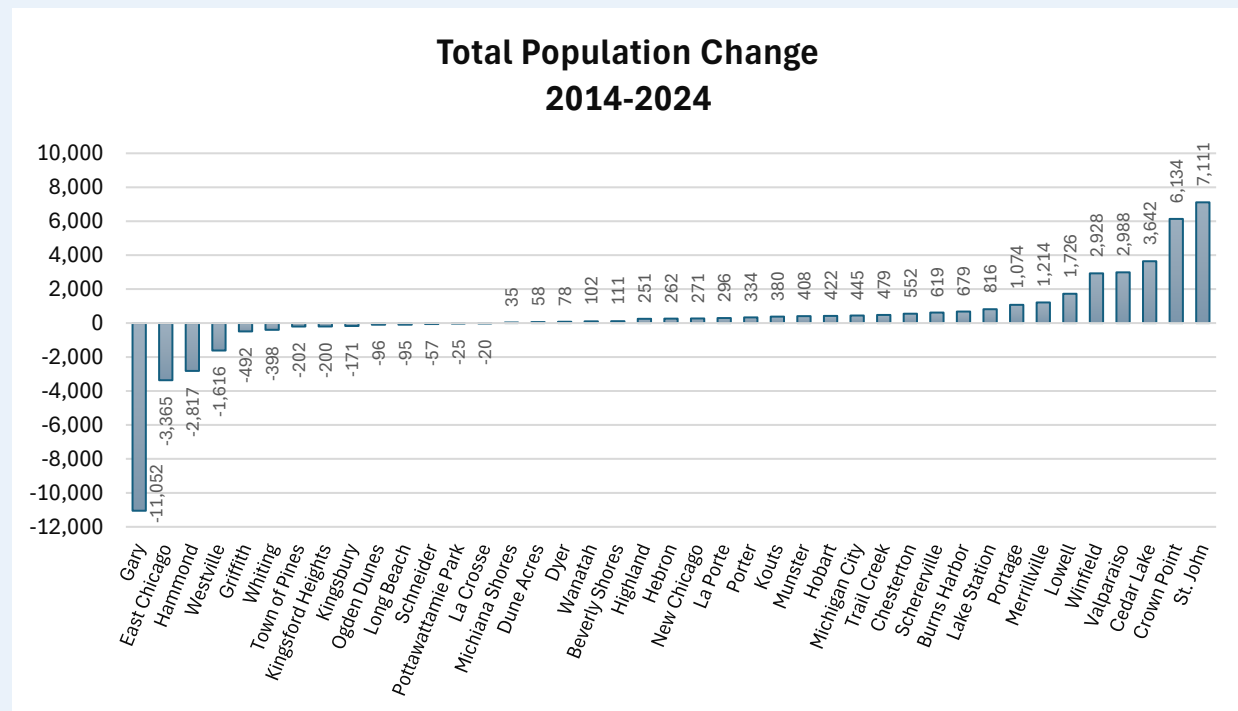


Figure 1-9: Total Population Change for all Named Places in Northwest Indiana

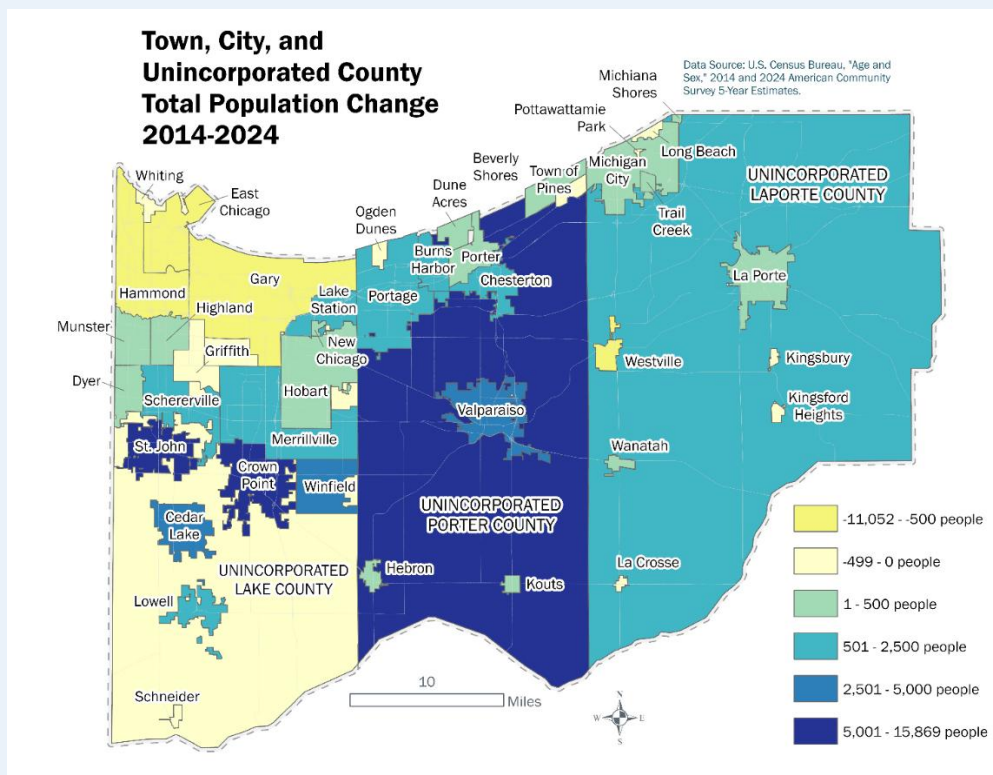


Figure 1-10: Total Population Change for all places in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties from 2014 to 2024

Considering both methods for assessing population change, smaller cities and highly populated urban centers show stable or shrinking populations, and older, inner-ring suburban populations are transitioning out of a growth phase into a stabilizing phase. Conversely, the newer suburbs that have developed on the fringes of the urban areas are experiencing the highest population growth, particularly in southern Lake County.

Population change at the Census block group scale provides a more granular picture of population dynamics from 2014 to 2024 (Figure 1-11). Aggregating population within municipal boundaries does not always reflect a community's true population distribution or account for development or economically connected areas that extend beyond political boundaries. Comparing populations using block groups enables precise, neighborhood-level analysis and helps identify population trends that can be lost in larger geographic divisions.

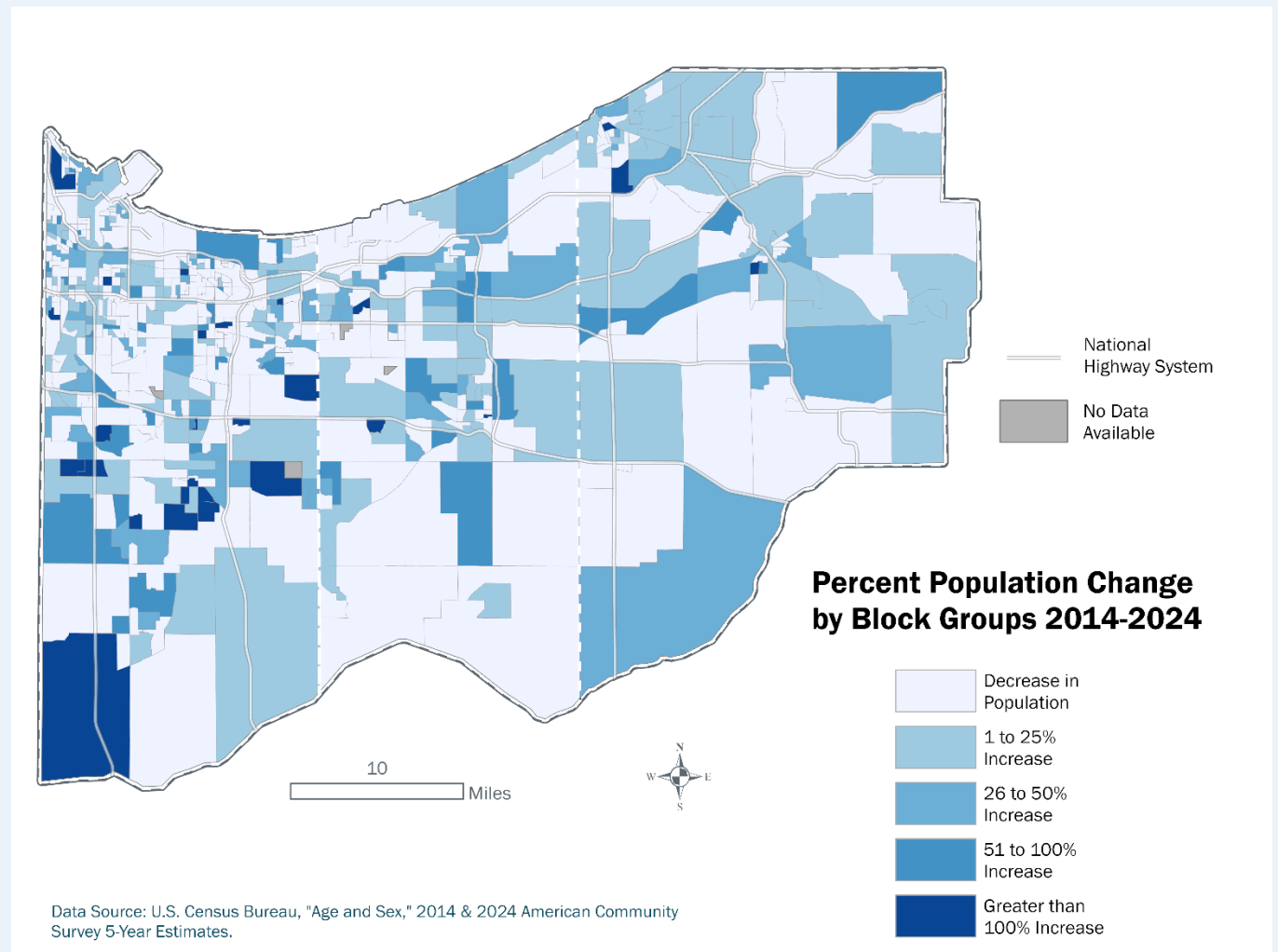


Figure 1-11: Population Change by U.S. Census Block Groups

From 2014 to 2024, noticeable increases occurred in areas throughout the region:

- In north Lake County, this includes the Robertsdale neighborhood in Hammond and residential communities near educational institutions, such as Purdue Northwest and Munster High School. Steady increases were also seen just east of the Illinois-Indiana state line between I-90 and I-80/94, as well as along Indianapolis Blvd. Certain neighborhoods in Gary experienced significant population increases. This includes neighborhoods along Chase St., as well as communities in Miller Beach and north of downtown Gary.
- In central and south Lake County, populations increased in the southern half of St. John and Crown Point, as well as the northern half of Winfield. Additionally, the Deep River

neighborhood, between Deep River County Park and Lake George in Hobart, experienced population growth. Population increased along U.S. Route 30 and U.S. Route 41 in the middle and southern Lake County. Additionally, growth was notable along the north-south corridor between S.R. 55 and I-65 as it passes through Merrillville and Crown Point.

- In Porter County, population increases centered around S.R. 49, between U.S. Route 6 and I-94, and on the fringes of the Valparaiso city limits.
- In La Porte County, the population increased primarily along the major corridors that run diagonally through the county. This includes the two interstates in addition to multiple U.S. highways and state routes. Smaller population increases also occurred in southern La Porte County at major roadway intersections

TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

The nearly 800,000 people residing in Northwest Indiana represent a broad range of ages, abilities, incomes, races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Historically, not all populations have benefited equally from transportation investments, and some have been underserved by transportation and underrepresented in the planning process. Additionally, certain populations tend to be more transit dependent, including low-income residents, minority populations, persons over 65, persons without a car, and individuals with disabilities.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits MPOs from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin in all their activities, policies, and programs. Additionally, 23 CFR 450.316(a)(1)(vii) requires *Seeking out and considering the needs of those traditionally underserved by existing transportation systems, such as low-income and minority households, who may face challenges accessing employment and other services*. NIRPC's goals reflect both the federal requirements and the regional commitment to ensuring that all populations have transportation options that provide access to jobs, schools, hospitals, and other points of interest. In both *NWI 2050* and *NWI 2050+*, an analysis was conducted to find areas with a disproportionately higher rate of exposure to adverse human health and environmental effects, which are linked to specific social and economic demographics. The factors included in this analysis are racial/ethnic minority status, low-income thresholds, limited English-speaking proficiency, disability status, veteran status, senior status (aged 65 and older), and no vehicle access. For each category, traditionally underserved populations were identified by U.S. Census block groups. Census Block Groups were chosen as the geographical unit of analysis because this was the most granular level for which data were available. Block groups with demographic factor scores higher than the regional average and within the 90th percentile or higher were identified as well as the change in traditionally underserved populations from 2014 to 2024.

MINORITY POPULATION

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a minority as those populations with race and ethnicities that are not non-Hispanic white Americans. These communities tend to have a higher exposure to air pollution and are more frequently dependent on public transit.

In Northwest Indiana, distinct areas have minority populations that are consistently higher than the regional average. These areas are located primarily in Lake County, north of I-80, extending south of Gary through Merrillville into north Crown Point along S.R. 55, S.R. 53 (Broadway), and I-65. In Porter County, a few minority communities are present in Wheeler, in Portage along U.S. 6, and in Westville. Additionally, minority neighborhoods are present in downtown Michigan City and La Porte. The locations of the minority population in the region have remained relatively consistent from 2014 to 2024, although areas adjacent to minority populations are becoming more diverse.

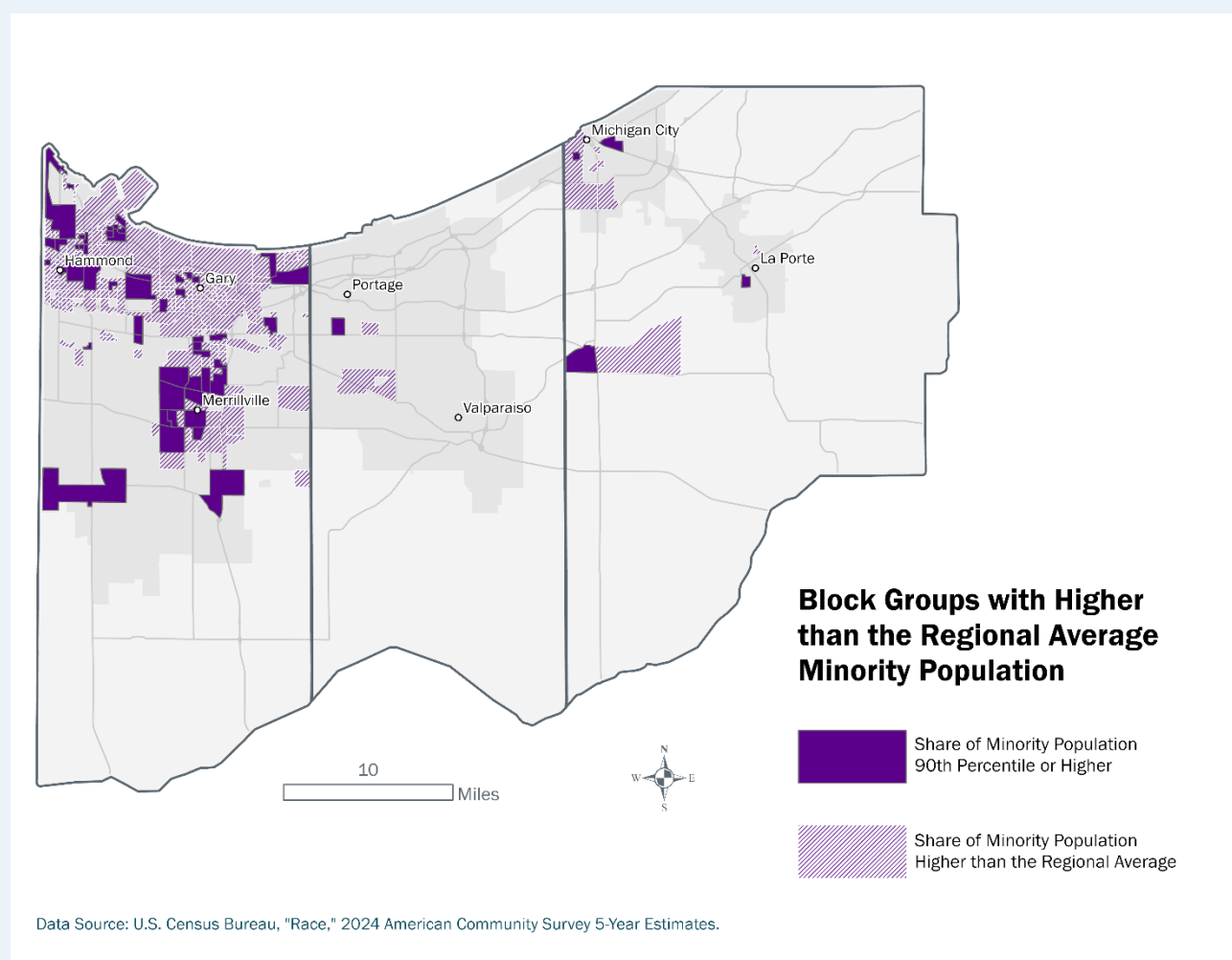


Figure 1-12: The minority population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups.

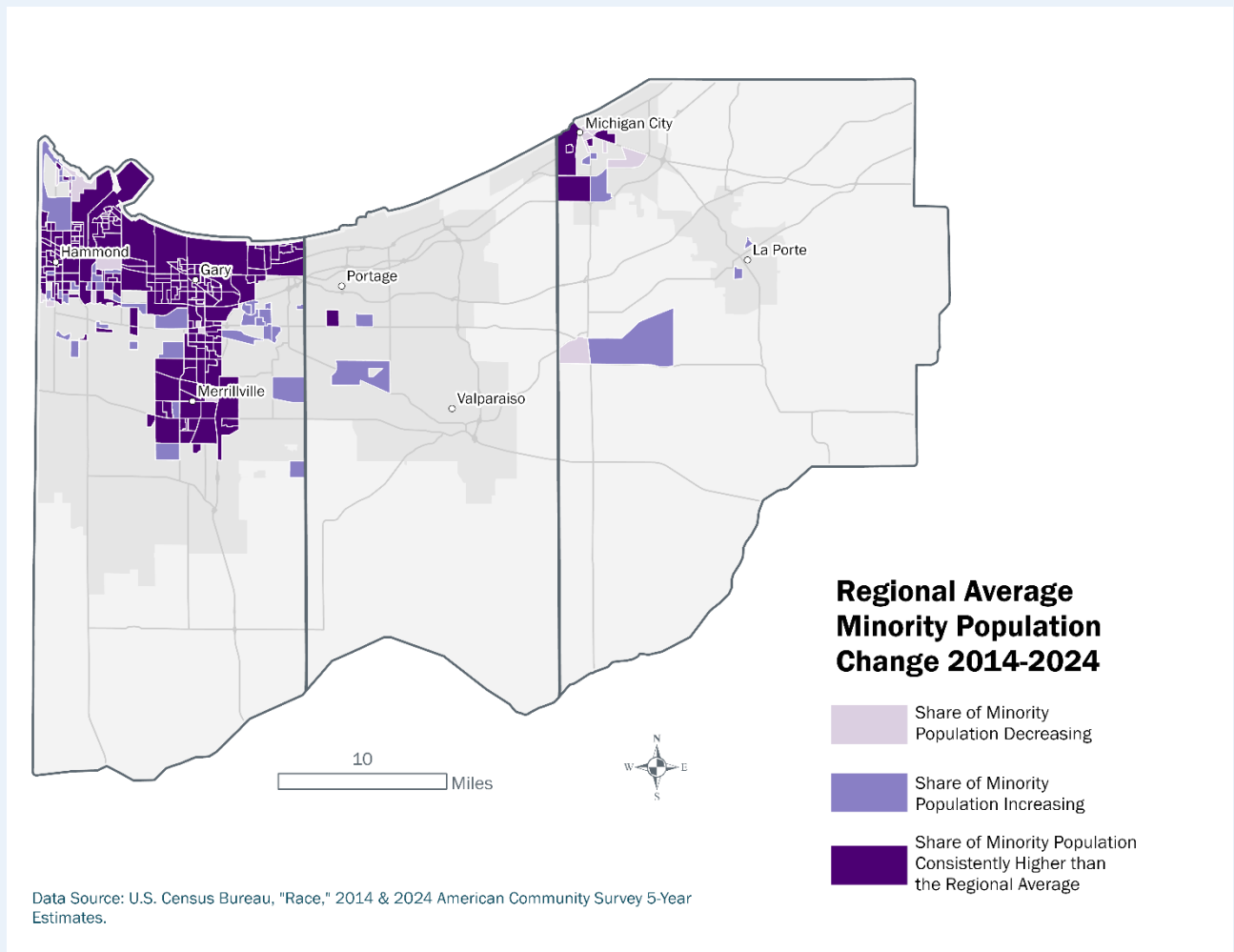


Figure 1-13: Minority population change in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

After housing, transportation is the second largest monthly expense for most families. Households with lower incomes are less likely to have the means to afford to buy a car. High-quality, affordable transportation that links workers to jobs, education, and healthcare can help ease financial burdens on communities and contribute to upward economic mobility.

There is some overlap between the areas with a greater number of low-income households and the areas with a higher minority population. This includes northern Lake County, Merrillville, and the urban centers in Michigan City and La Porte. However, some small pockets of low-income earners exist in the downtown portions of Cedar Lake, Valparaiso, and Portage, in addition to rural communities such as Wanatah and Kingsford Heights.

From 2014 to 2024, the population of low-income households in unincorporated Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties decreased. However, areas in the dense urban centers of Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, Merrillville, Valparaiso, La Porte, and Michigan City have a low-income population that is consistently higher than the regional average.

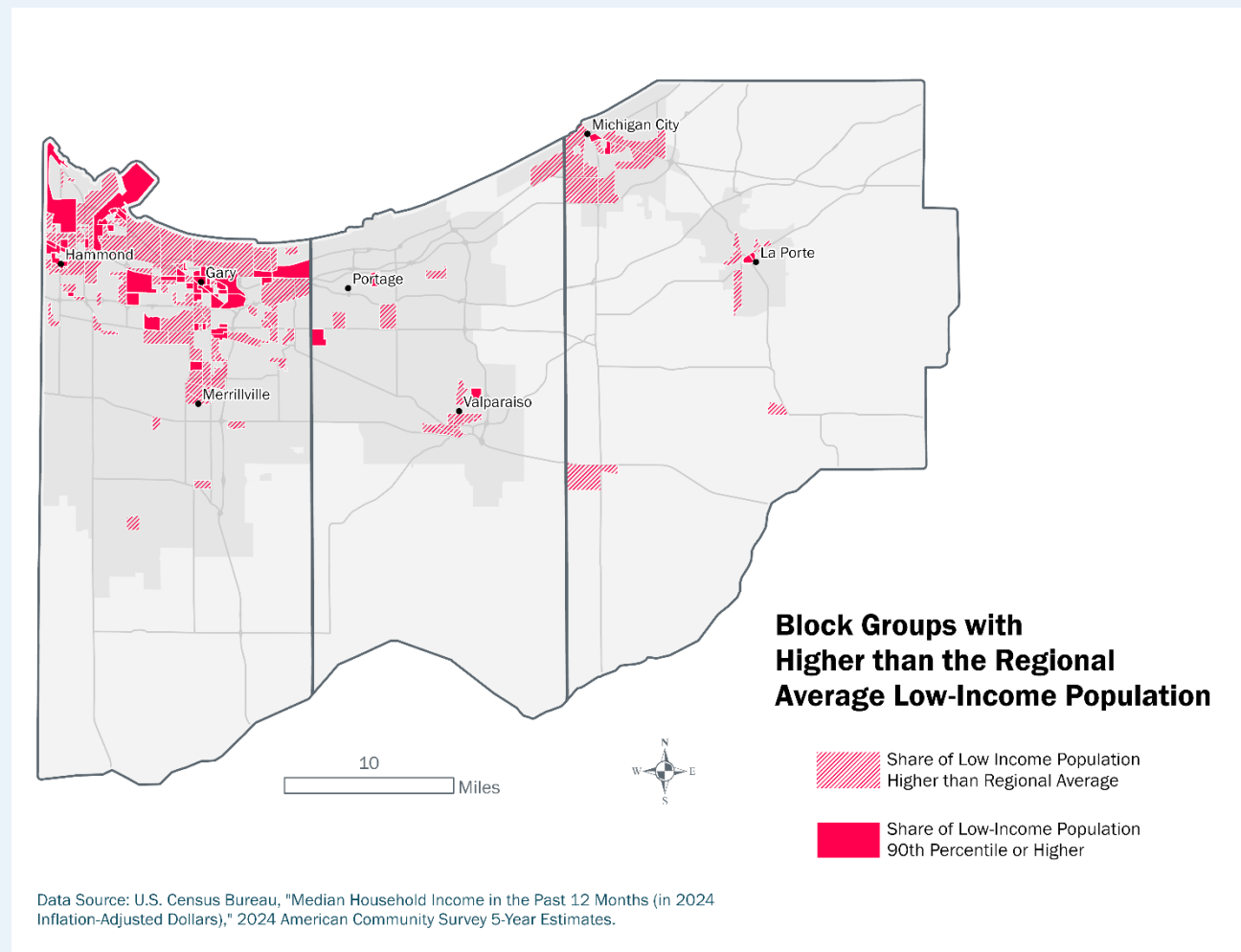


Figure 1-14: The low-income population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups.

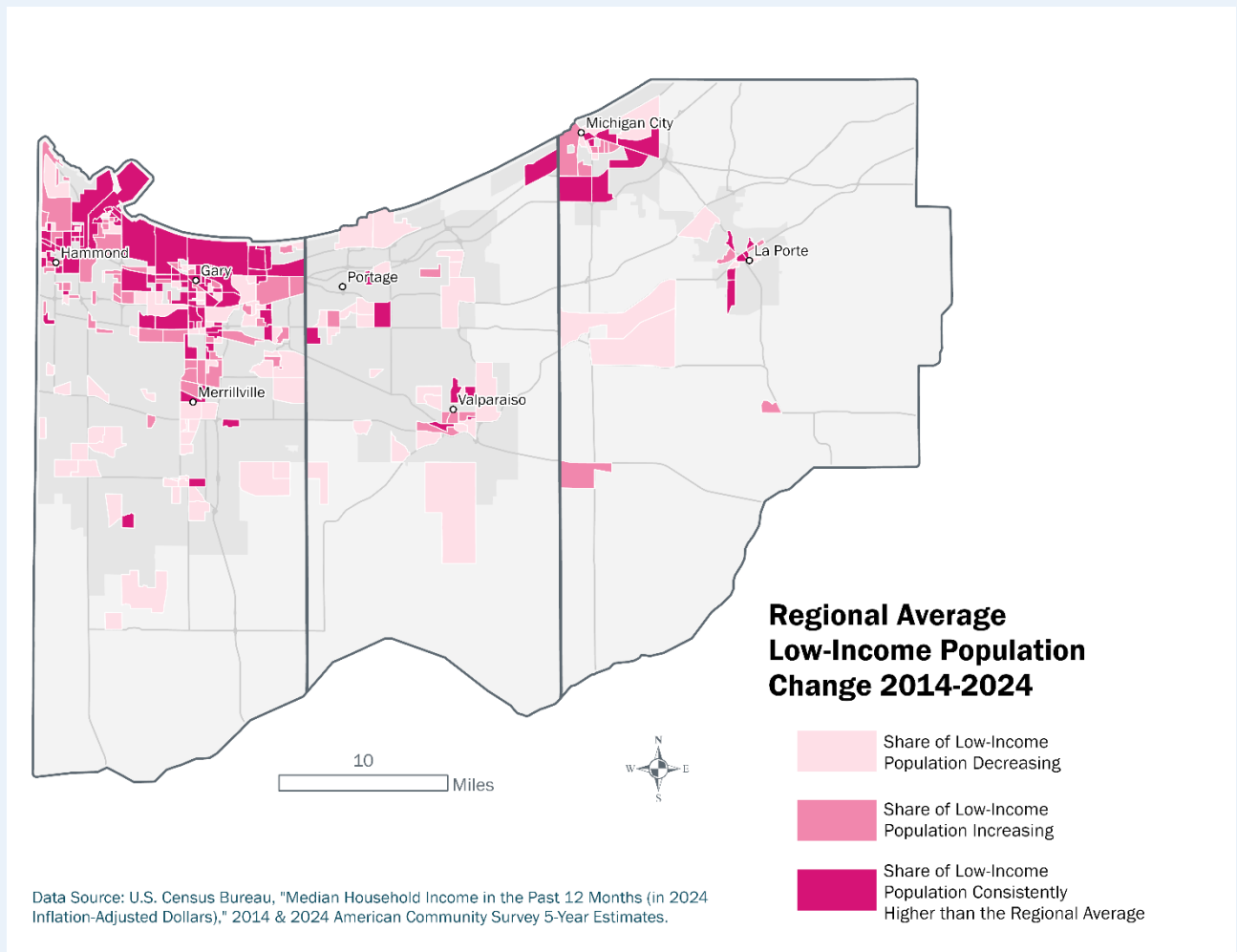


Figure 1-15: Low-income population change in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

LIMITED-ENGLISH SPEAKING POPULATION

Groups with limited English-speaking ability rely on public transit more than the general population. Limited-English speaking communities in Northwest Indiana tend to be concentrated in Hammond, Whiting, and East Chicago, and in larger cities such as Valparaiso, Michigan City, and La Porte, where public transit is available, but they are also located throughout the region where there is little to no transit available. Concentrated communities are located in portions of Munster, Highland, Crown Point, and the southeast section of Merrillville; along the lakeshore in Michiana Shores, Portage, and the old Tremont neighborhood that surrounds the Indiana Dunes State and National Parks; and in neighborhoods in small to mid-sized towns like Cedar Lake, Lowell, Hebron, Chesterton, and Kingsford Heights.

Between 2016 and 2024, the locations of the limited-English-speaking populations have stayed consistent.

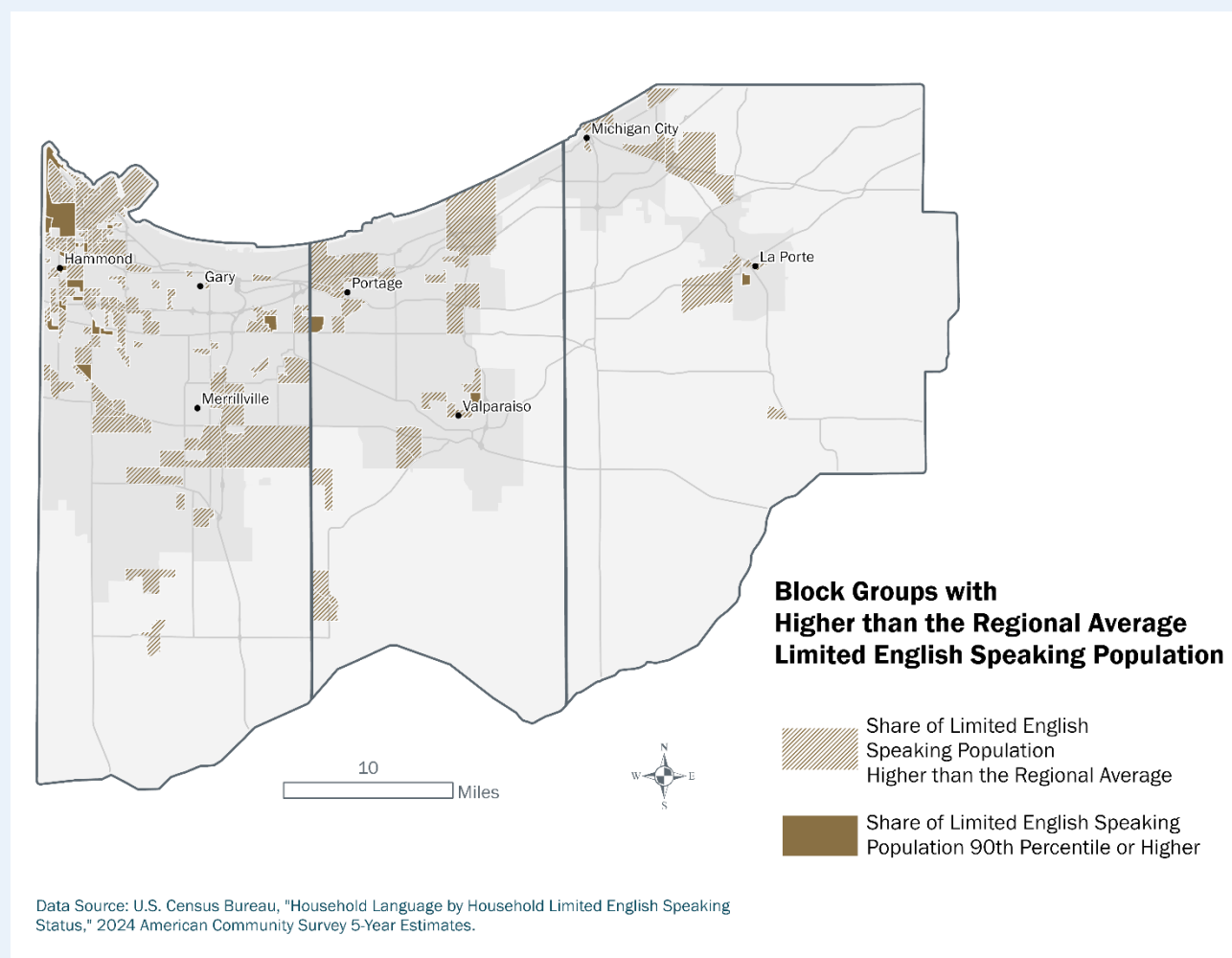


Figure 1-16: The limited-English speaking population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

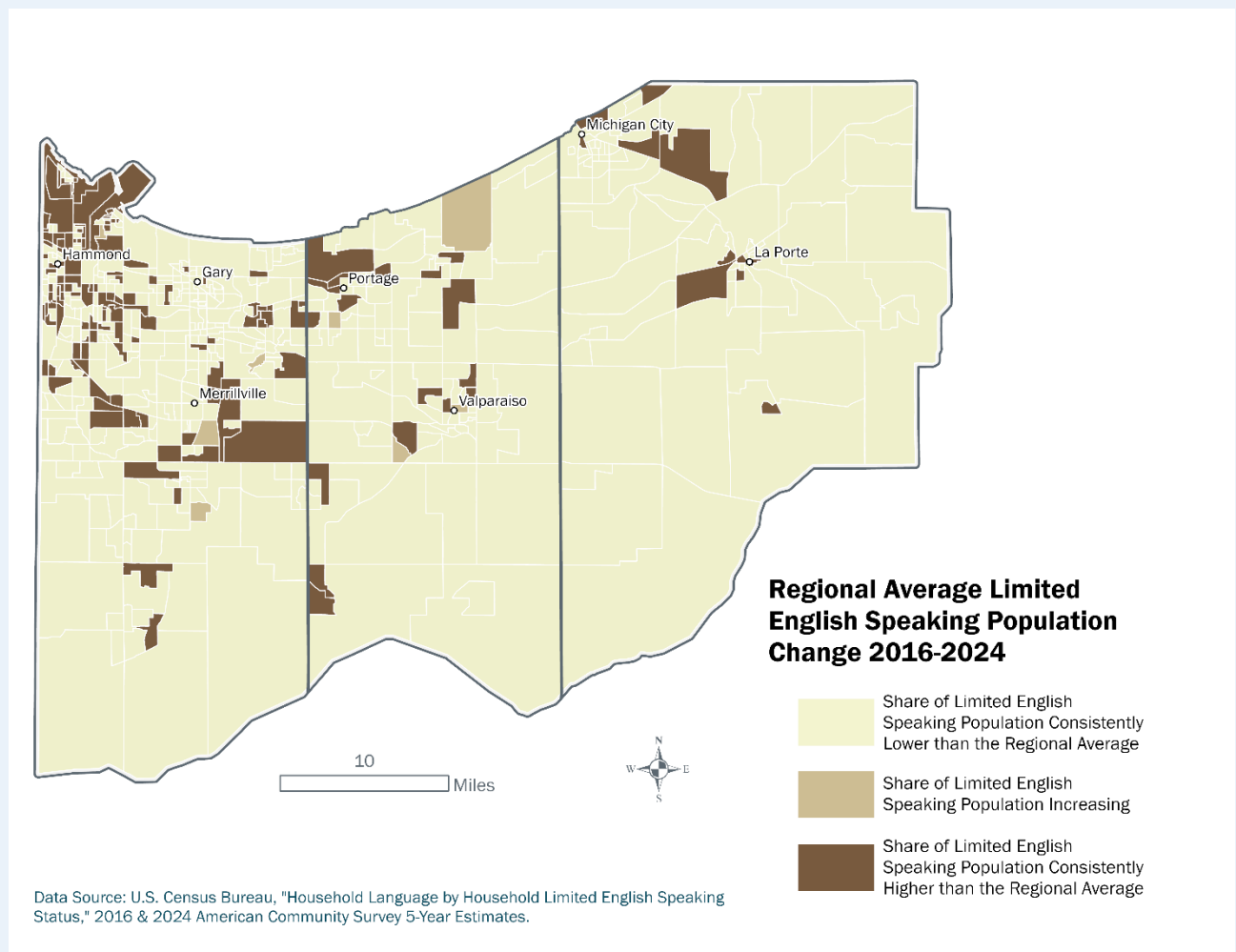


Figure 1-17: Low-income population change in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2016 to 2024

DISABLED POPULATION

Planning for the transportation needs of the disabled population is required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). People with disabilities are significantly less likely to own vehicles and are 3-5 times more likely to use transit.

The disabled community in Northwest Indiana has a wide geographic range. Although there is a high concentration of the disabled population in southern Hammond, Gary, Lake Station, New Chicago, and northern Hobart, the areas with the highest disability percentage are situated on the outskirts of city centers. This is true for the Highland, Griffith, Munster, Dyer, St. John, Portage, Chesterton, Valparaiso, La Porte, and Michigan City. Amongst Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties, La Porte County has the highest proportion of disabled people at 15.5%, followed by Lake at 14%, and Porter County at 11.5%.

Over time, the East Chicago, Gary, New Chicago, Lake Station, and Merrillville region has consistently had a disabled population that is higher than the regional average. This is also true for downtown Michigan City and La Porte, in addition to rural communities in unincorporated La Porte County.

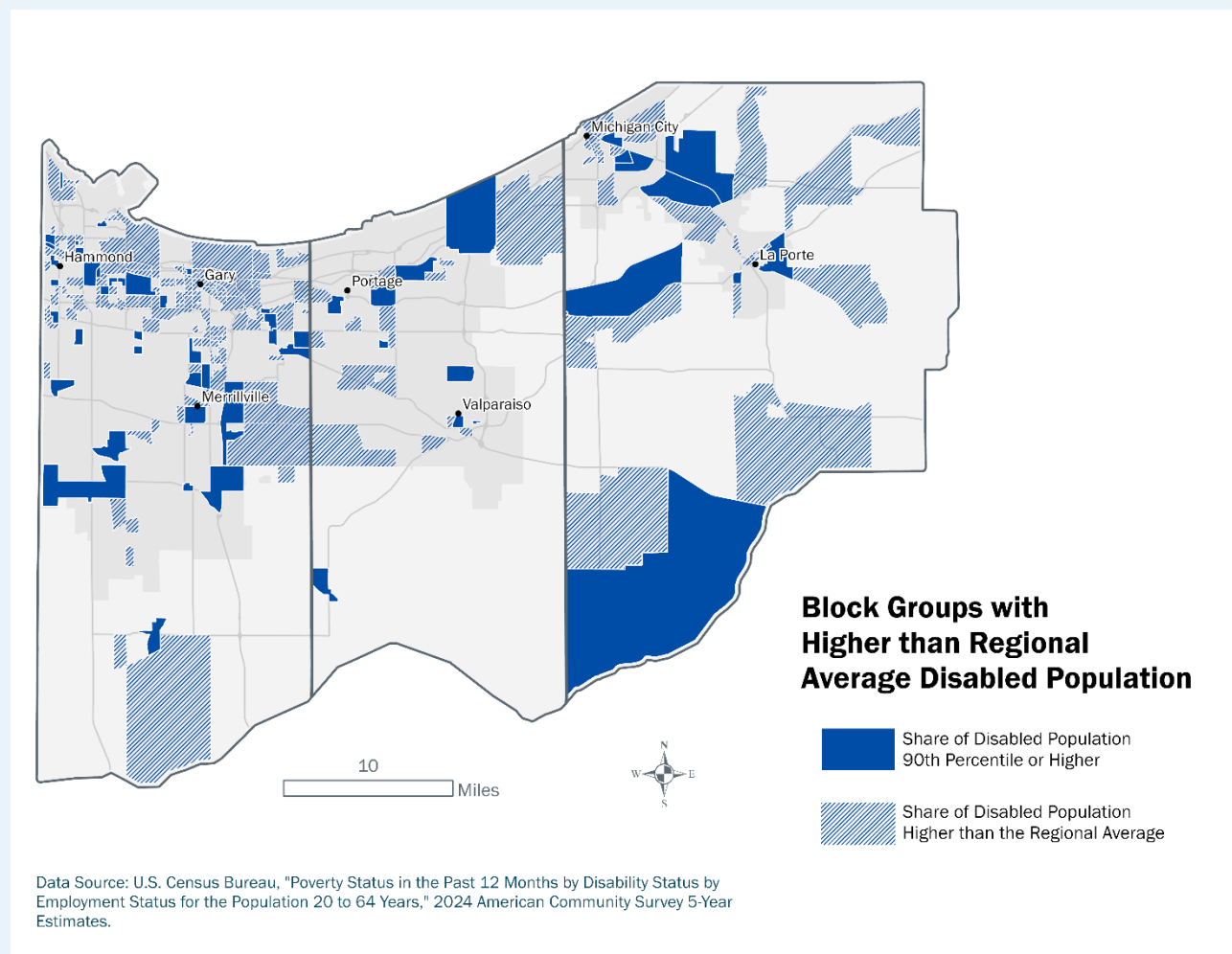


Figure 1-18: The disabled population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

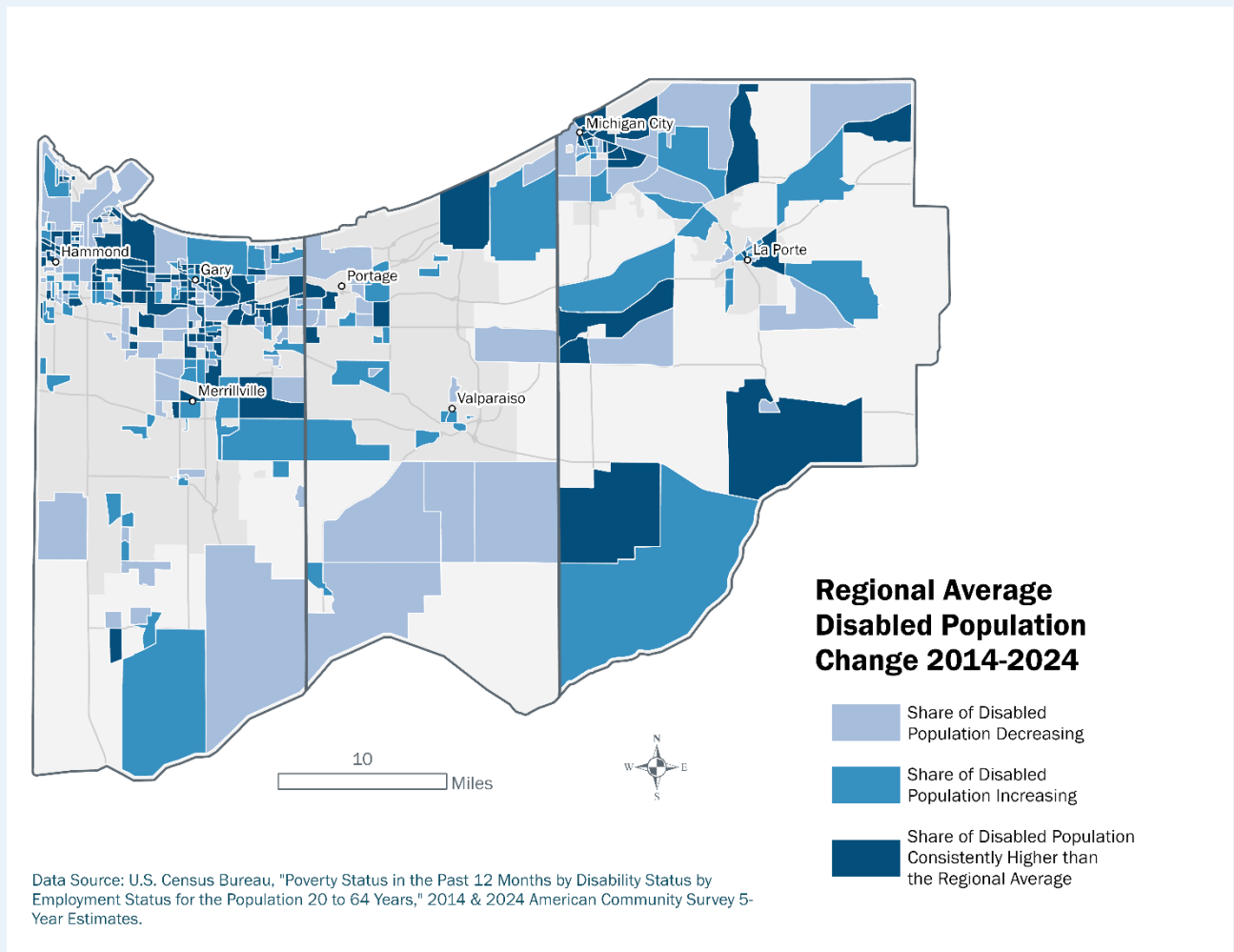


Figure 1-19: The disabled population change in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

VETERAN POPULATION

About 37,000 military veterans live in Northwest Indiana. Approximately one-quarter of military veterans describe themselves as living with a disability. Compared to the general population, veterans have greater health needs and may need to travel to specific locations, like VA hospitals, to receive healthcare services.

In Lake County, areas with a high percentage of veterans extend from north to south Lake County, between U.S. 41 and Broadway. In Porter County, these areas are found in the western and southern portions of the county. The rural areas in La Porte County, in addition to the east side of the City of La Porte, experience the highest percentage of veteran populations.

Between 2014 to 2024, Veteran populations increased and decreased in areas throughout the region with no discernible pattern.

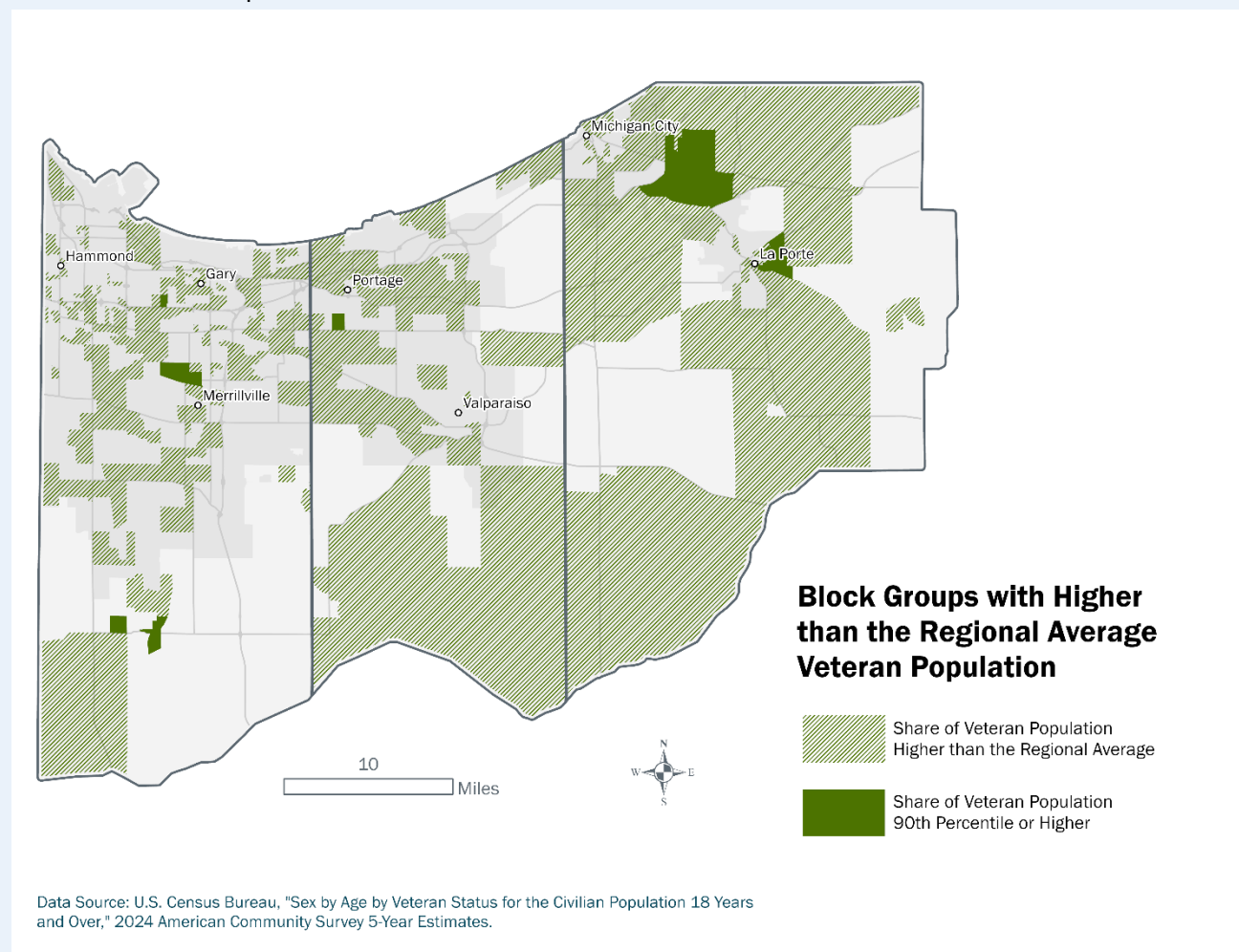


Figure 1-20: The veteran population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

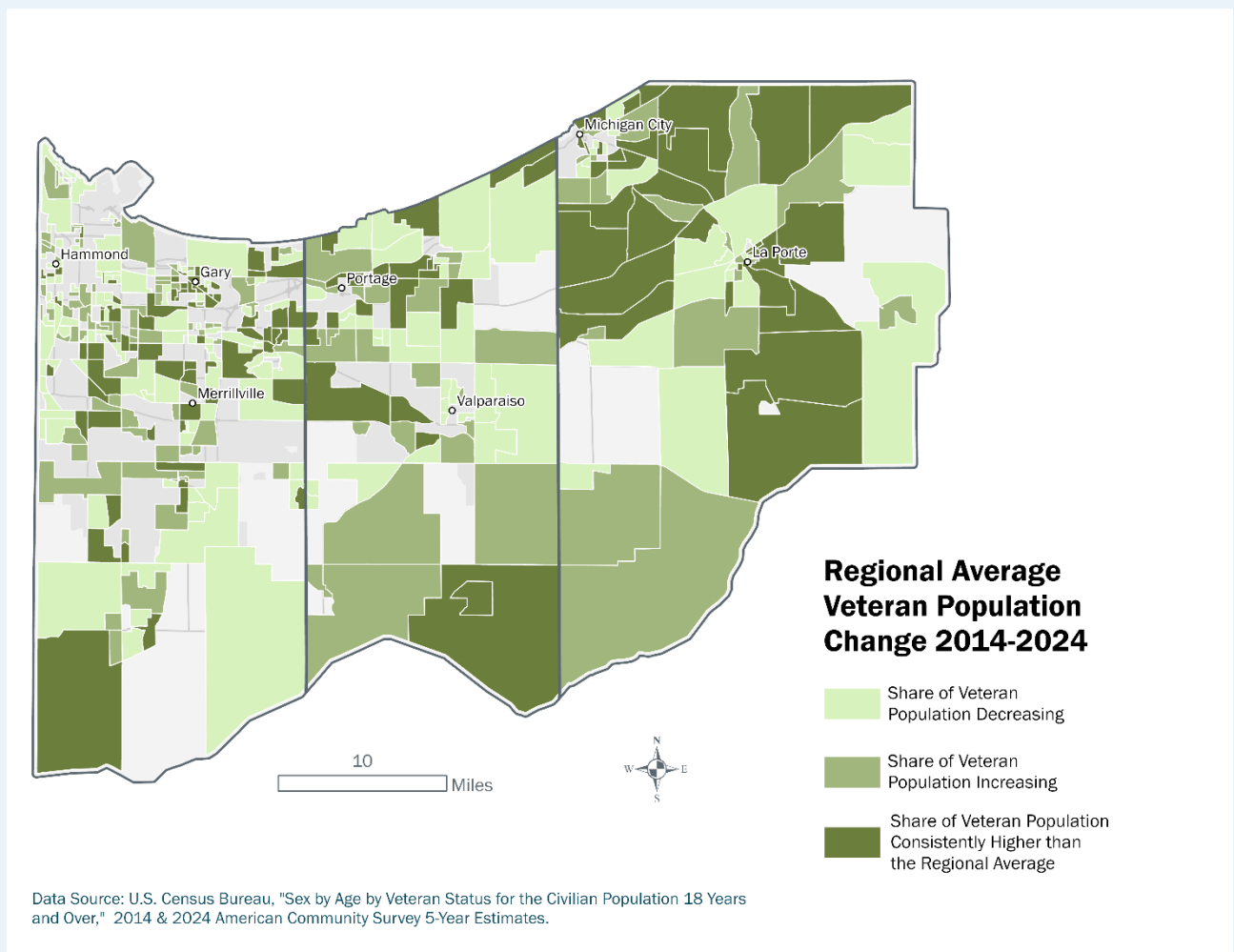


Figure 1-21: The veteran population change in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

ELDERLY POPULATION

In Northwest Indiana, the elderly population is mainly concentrated in areas outside the boundaries of large cities, as well as outside the Census-designated Urban Area. The only exceptions are small neighborhoods in Merrillville, Michigan City, La Porte, and where the towns of Highland and Griffith meet.

Between 2014 and 2024, the elderly population appears to be increasing in town/city centers in north Lake County and in unincorporated Porter and La Porte County.

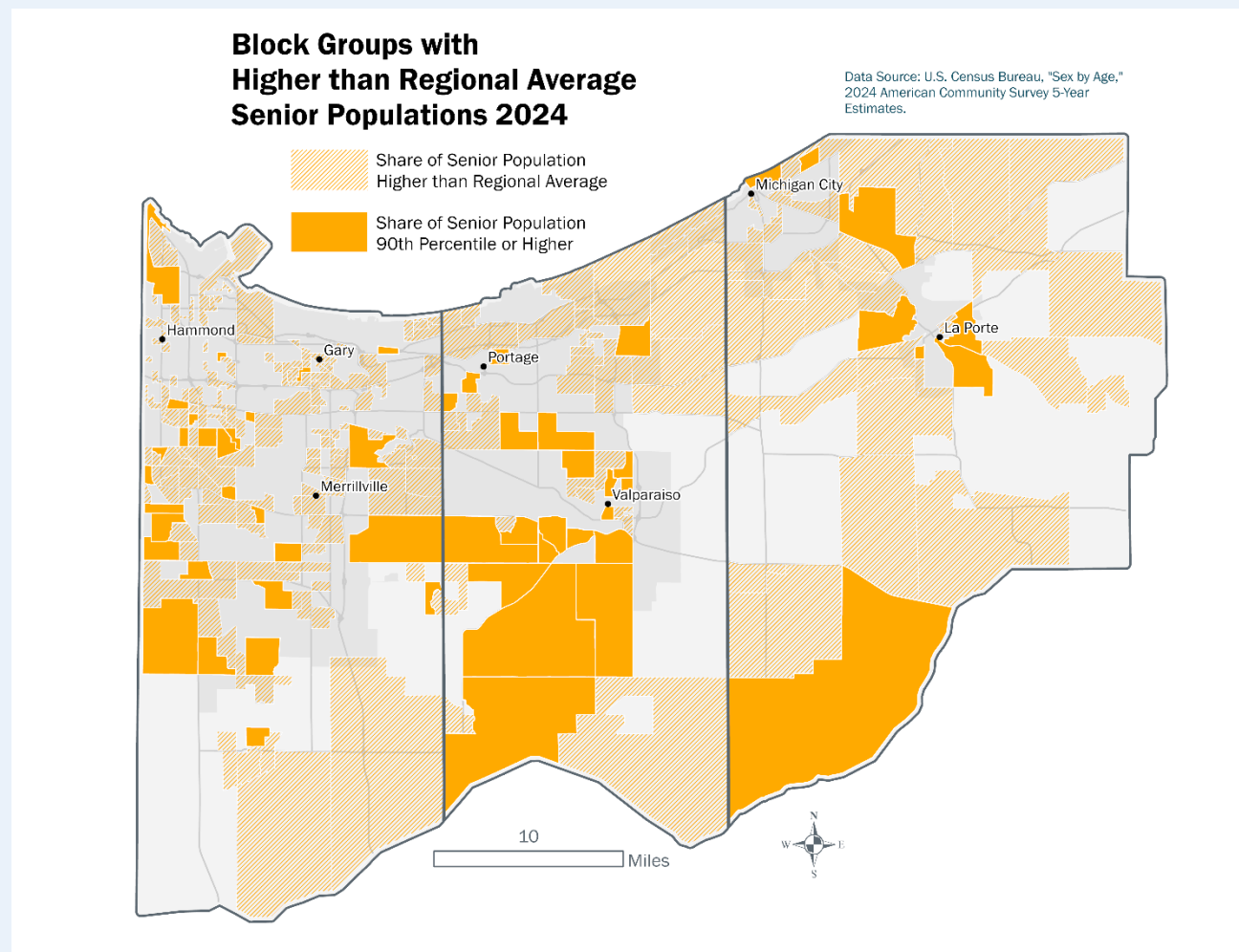


Figure 1-22: The elderly population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

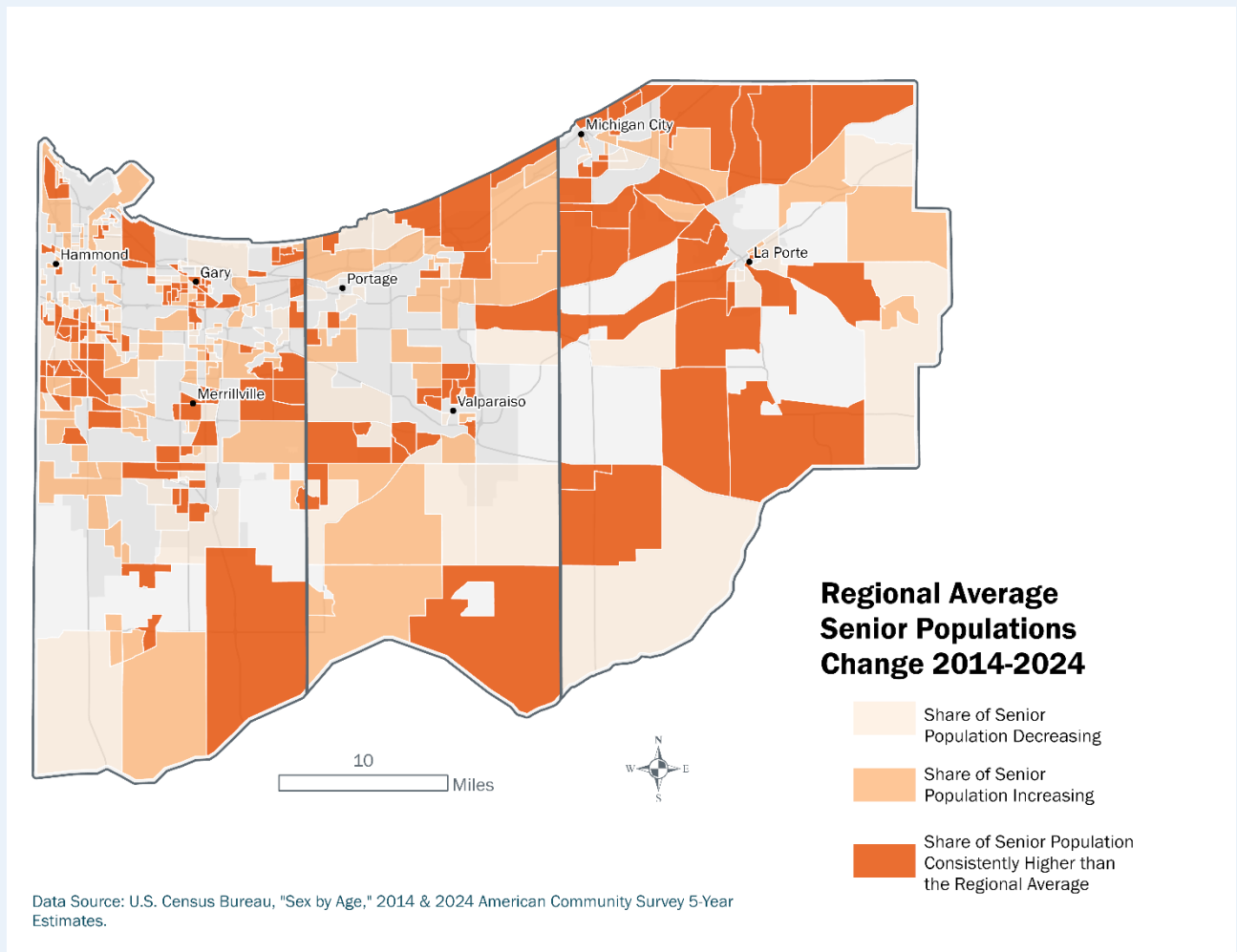


Figure 1-23: The elderly population change in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

POPULATION WITH NO VEHICLE ACCESS

In 2024, the populations with no vehicle access were concentrated in zones that have fixed route transit services. This is true except for portions of Portage, Cedar Lake, and Lowell.

Between 2014 to 2024, most of the increases in the population with no vehicle access occur where there is a high density of fixed route transit lines and stops. Most decreases in no vehicle access populations are seen on the outskirts of fixed route transit services like the north side of East Chicago, the east side of Hobart, the north side of Portage, the southwest side of Valparaiso, and the southwest portions of Michigan City and La Porte.

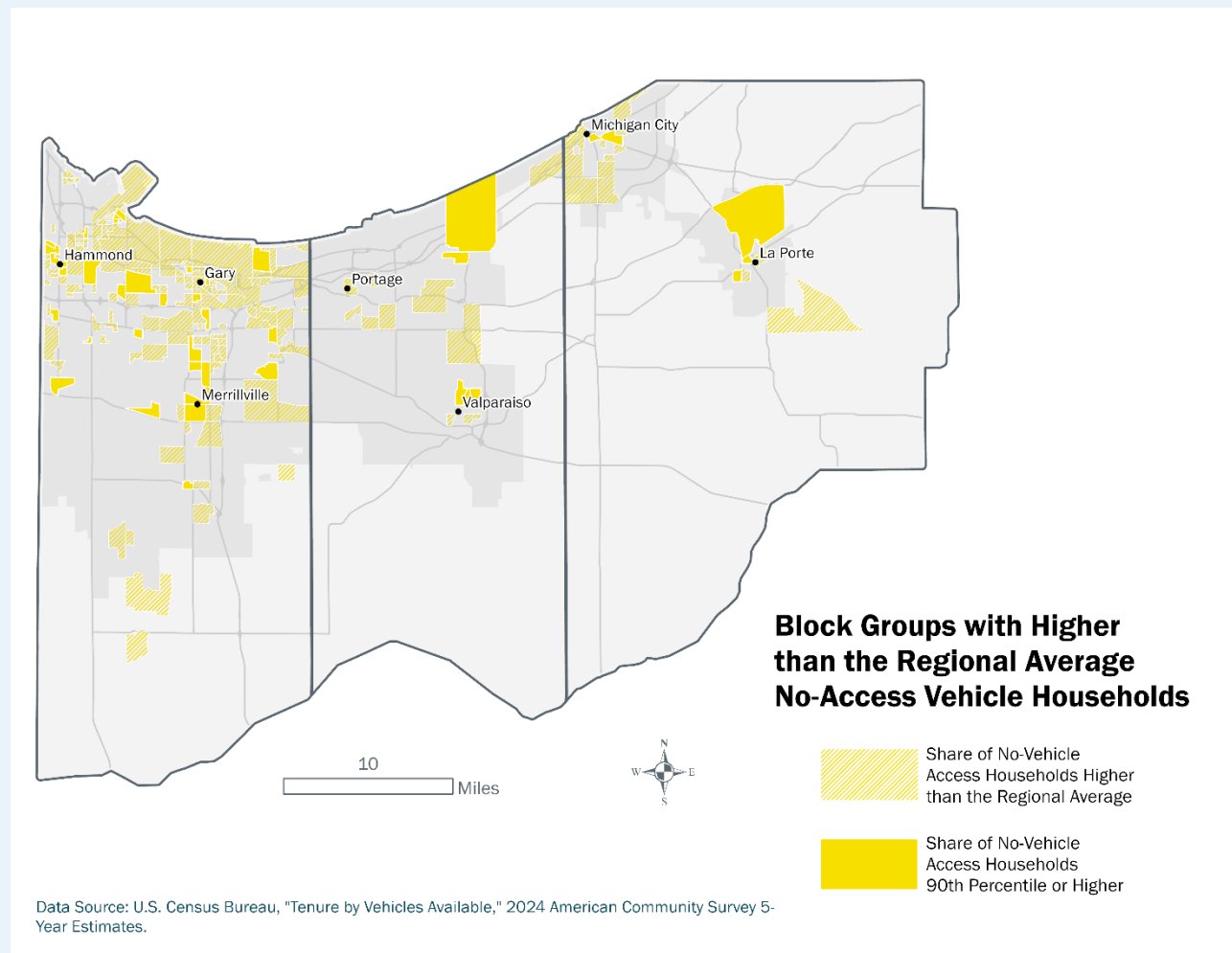


Figure 1-24: The population with no vehicle access in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

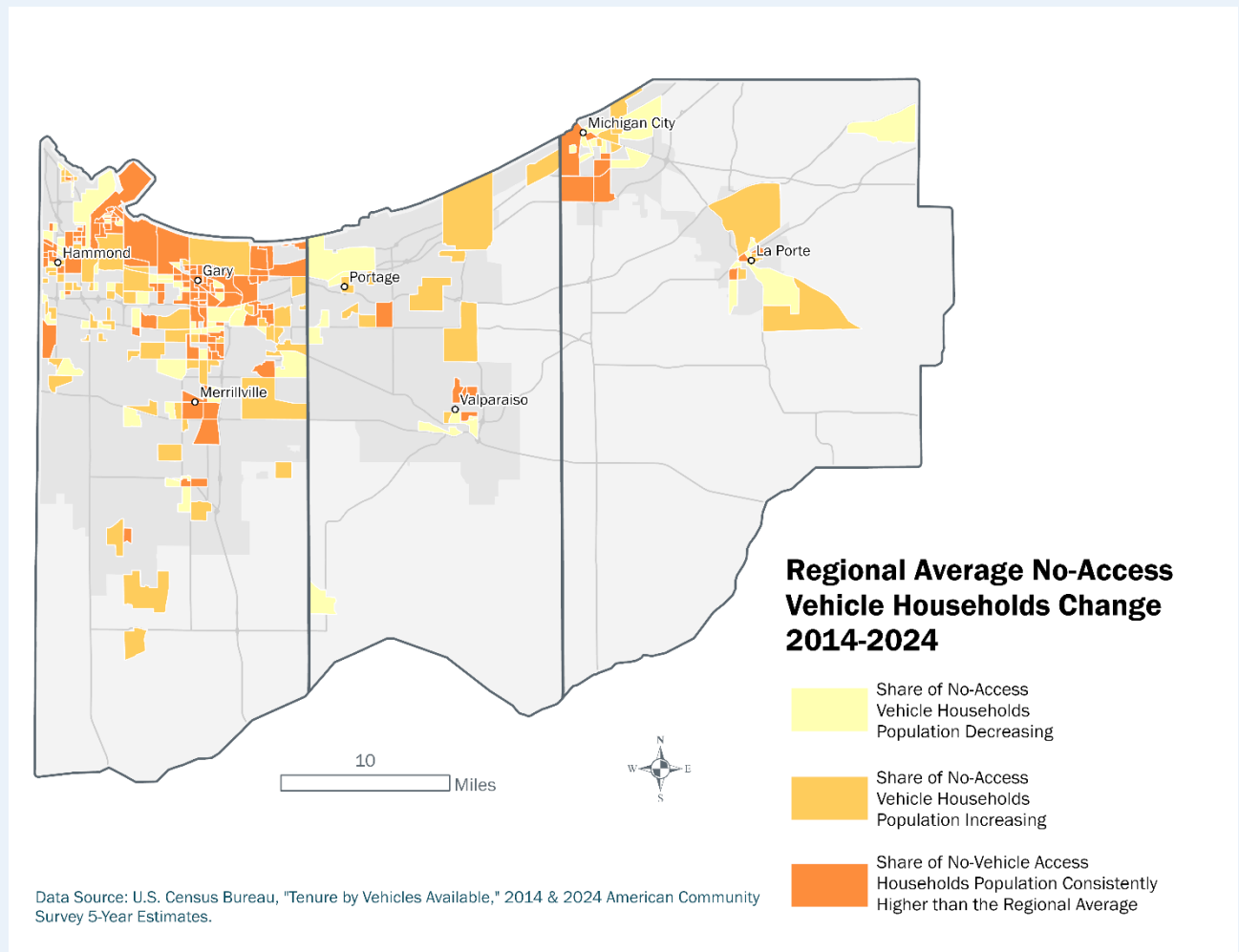


Figure 1-25: The change in the no vehicle access population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

TRADITIONALLY UNDERSERVED POPULATION INDEX

NIRPC developed a traditionally underserved index using the demographics factors described above: racial/ethnic minority status, low-income thresholds, limited English-speaking proficiency, disability status, veteran status, senior status (aged 65 and older), and no vehicle access. For each category, block groups with a population higher than the regional average received a 1, while those with a population lower than the regional average received a 0. The category indices were summed up to create an overall traditionally underserved index spanning from 0 to 7, with 7 being the most underserved and 0 being the least underserved. Block groups with index scores of four or greater are identified as having a significant portion of the population that is underserved.

Traditionally underserved block groups can be seen in *Figure 1-26*. Most of these communities are within 5 miles of the lakeshore. Block groups containing the largest number of traditionally underserved people are located in Hammond, East Chicago, Gary, Merrillville, and Lake Station. Pockets of traditionally underserved people exist in Valparaiso, Lowell, Winfield, and La Porte.

Between 2014 to 2024 minimal change occurred, geographically, in areas that were deemed to have a high percentage of traditionally underserved people. However, noticeable increases include areas where transit access has been increased, while decreases appear to be in portions of Gary, East Chicago, Merrillville, Michigan City, and between Valparaiso and La Porte along S. R. 2.

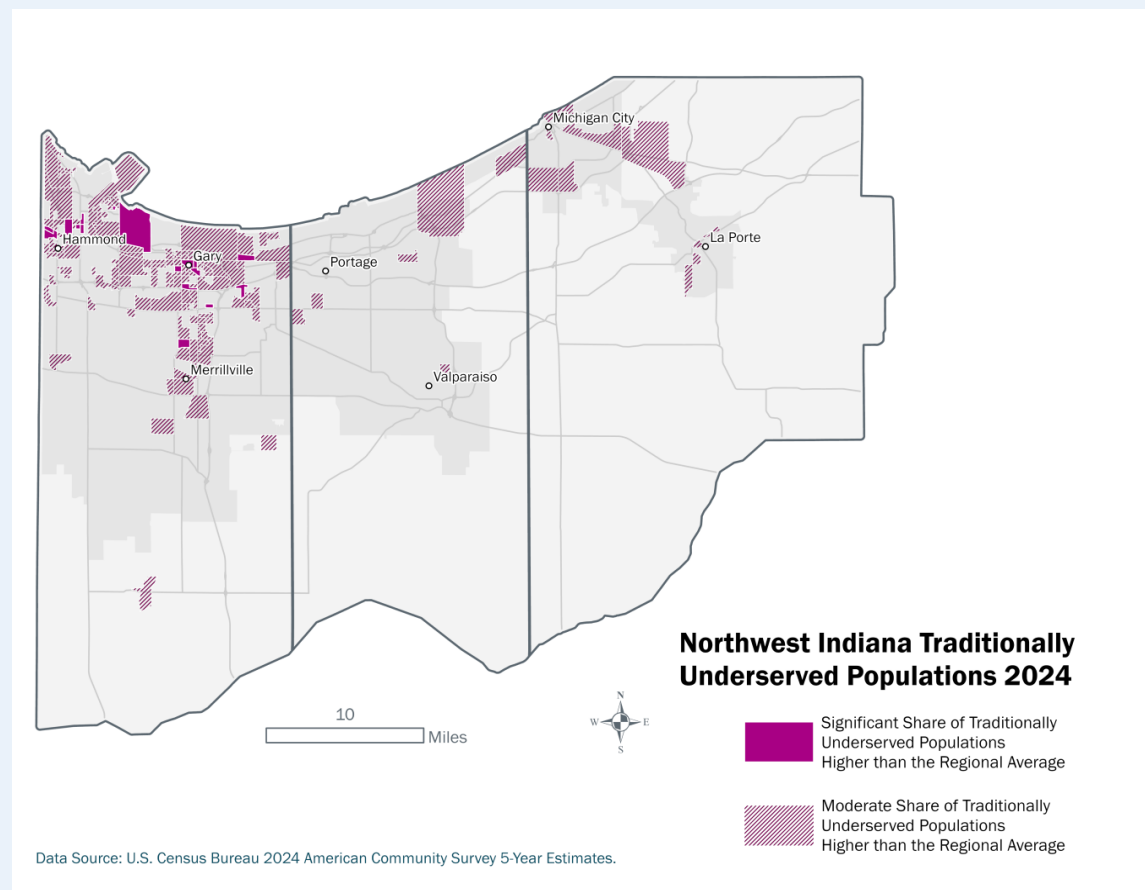


Figure 1-26: The traditionally underserved population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

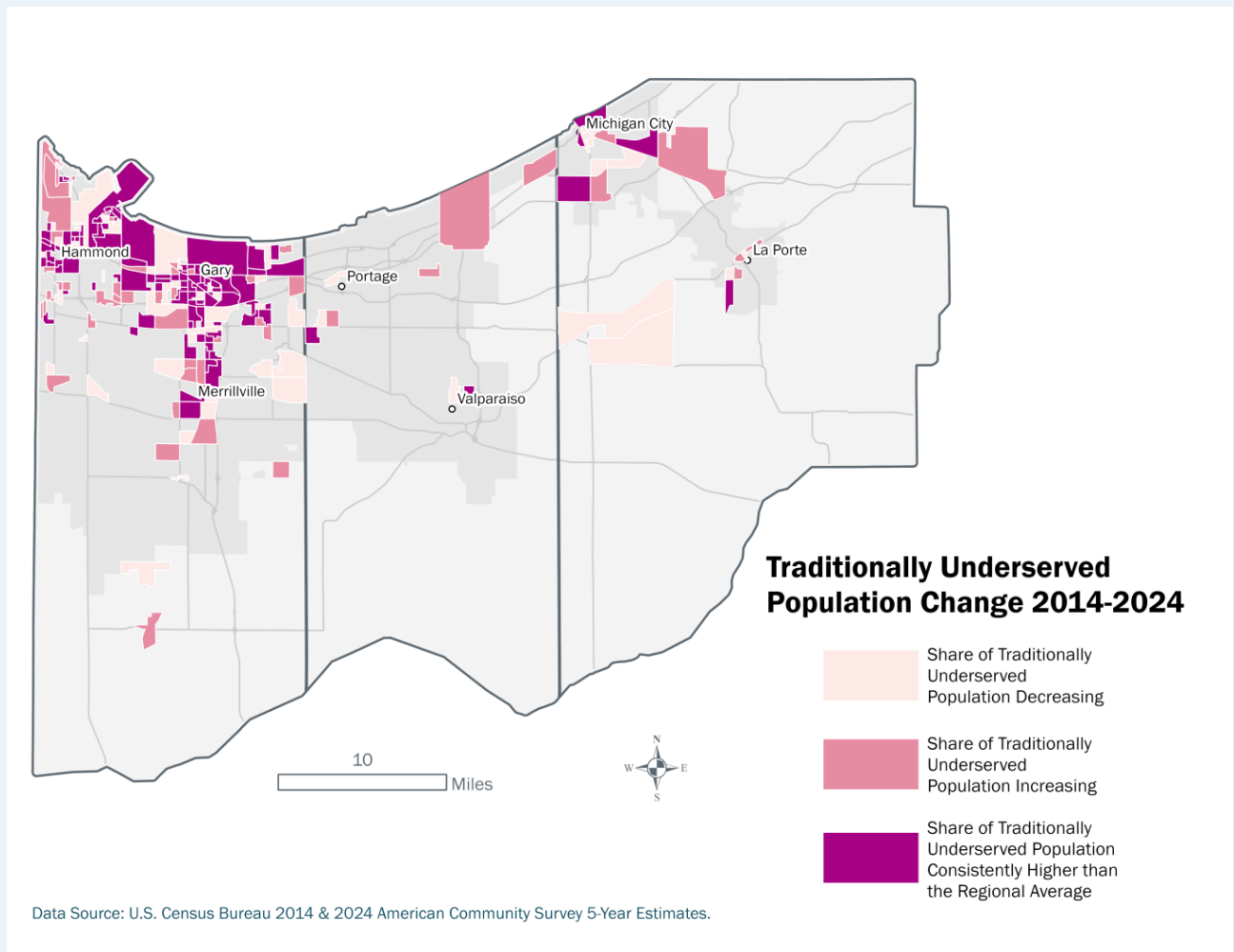


Figure 1-27: The change in the traditionally underserved population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties by block groups from 2014 to 2024

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Socio-economic dynamics are often overlooked as a significant underlying factor in the success of urban planning activities. In Northwest Indiana, the local economy has been heavily influenced by the industrial hub along Lake Michigan. Heavy industry and steel manufacturing have contributed to one of the strongest clusters of primary metal industrial manufacturers in the U.S. and globally. To support the heavy industry in the area, Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties have strong industrial infrastructure, such as major highways, commercial and passenger rail lines, the Port of Indiana in Burns Harbor, and the Gary-Chicago International Airport to facilitate trade and commerce. Examining community economic performance over time can reveal how investments in transportation system improvements are contributing to overall economic growth.

WORKFORCE IN NWI

In 2002, the number of jobs held in the region was just under 285,000. This was the lowest number of jobs in the region in the last two decades, aside from the loss of jobs in 2009 and 2021 due to the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Pandemic Recession. After the 2009 recession, it took almost 10 years for the region to regain the more than 15,000 jobs lost during the Great Recession. The number of jobs in the region was approaching 300,000 in 2019, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decrease of 25,000 jobs in a little over two years. However, the job market was able to rebound, and by 2023, the number of jobs in the region had grown back to pre-pandemic levels of just under 300,000.

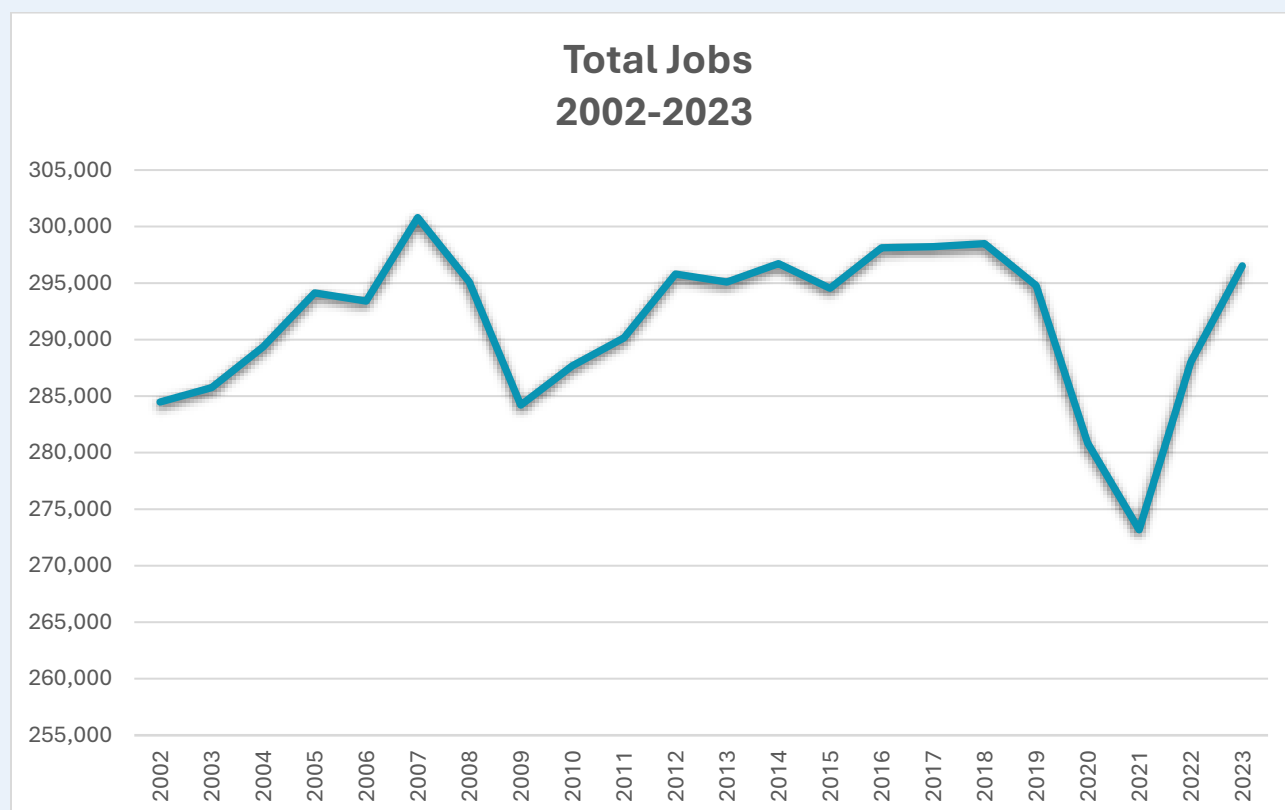


Figure 1-28: The total number of jobs in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties from 2002 to 2023.

The rate of unemployment in the region from 2000 to 2026 mirrors the fluctuation in jobs during roughly the same period. In 2000, the region experienced its lowest rate of unemployment, although there were approximately 15,000 fewer jobs in the area than there are now. From 2002 to 2008, the unemployment rate was stable across the three counties, with Lake and La Porte County having about a 6% unemployment rate, while Porter County had a 4.5% unemployment rate. By 2009, those rates had almost doubled. Again, it would take almost ten years for the unemployment rates to return to the rates experienced in the mid-late 2000s. In 2019, the region experienced some of its lowest unemployment rates in years, with Lake County at 4.1%, Porter County at 3.3%, and La Porte County at 3.5%. However, the COVID-19 Pandemic caused those rates to increase by over four times, but similar to the number of jobs, those rates dropped back down to pre-pandemic levels in the next couple of years.

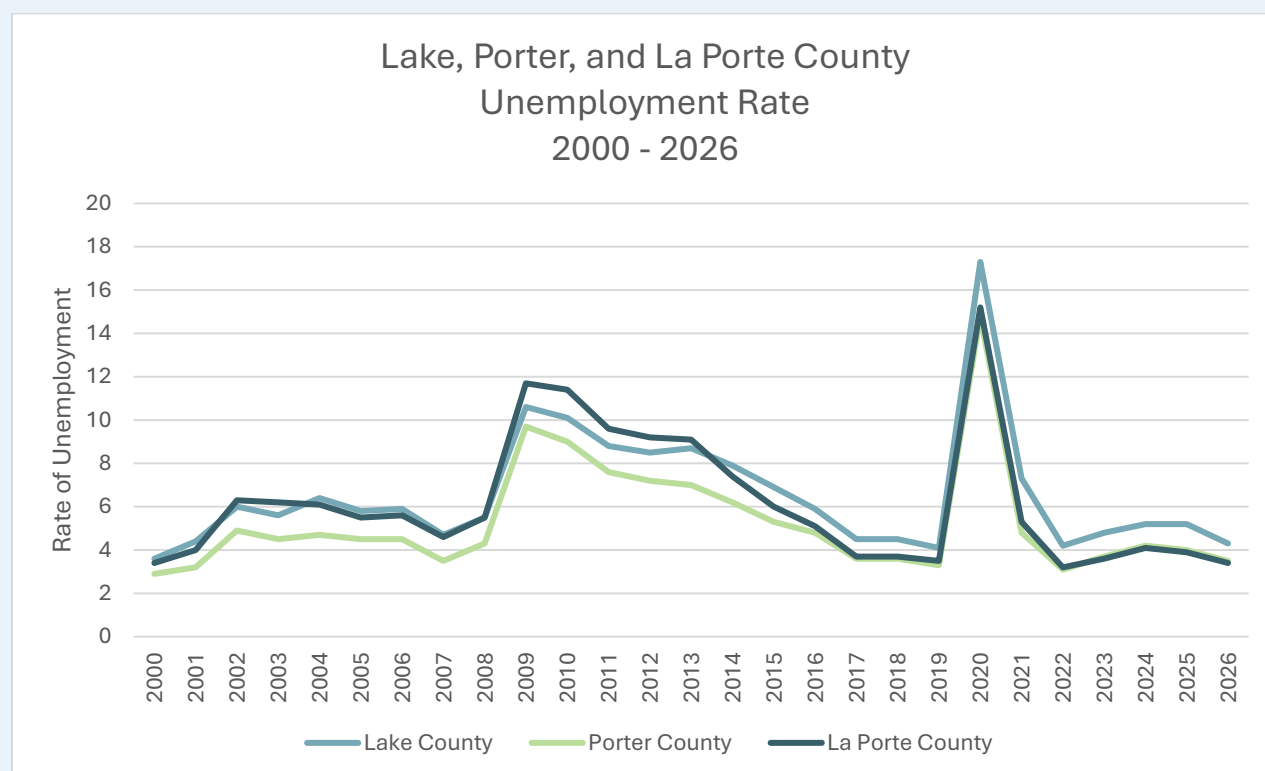


Figure 1-29: The unemployment rate for Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties from 200 to 2026.

In September of 2019, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the United States Department of Commerce designated the area of Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties as an Economic Development District (EDD). To achieve this designation, the three counties had to meet the EDA's regional distress criteria. It was determined that Porter County is distressed by unemployment, whereas Lake and La Porte counties have historically been distressed by both unemployment and income. The EDD designation opens the door to additional funding assistance from the EDA for economic development-related purposes. As the EDD, NIRPC is also responsible for developing a strategy for regional economic growth known as a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). In coordination with the Purdue Center for Regional Development, NIRPC's CEDS was recently updated in 2025.

The tables below show the change in workforce demographics over time, both by job earnings and industry. The earning potential of the Northwest Indiana workforce has increased over time.

The percentage of workers making \$3,333 or more per month increased by almost 25% from 2002 to 2023. The percentage of workers who make between \$1,251 to \$3,333 per month decreased by 10%, while those making less than \$1,250 per month decreased by almost 15%. In 2023, over half of the working population in Northwest Indiana was earning more than \$3,333 per month. Overall, this shows that a larger percentage of the working population in 2026 has a higher income than the working population in 2002.

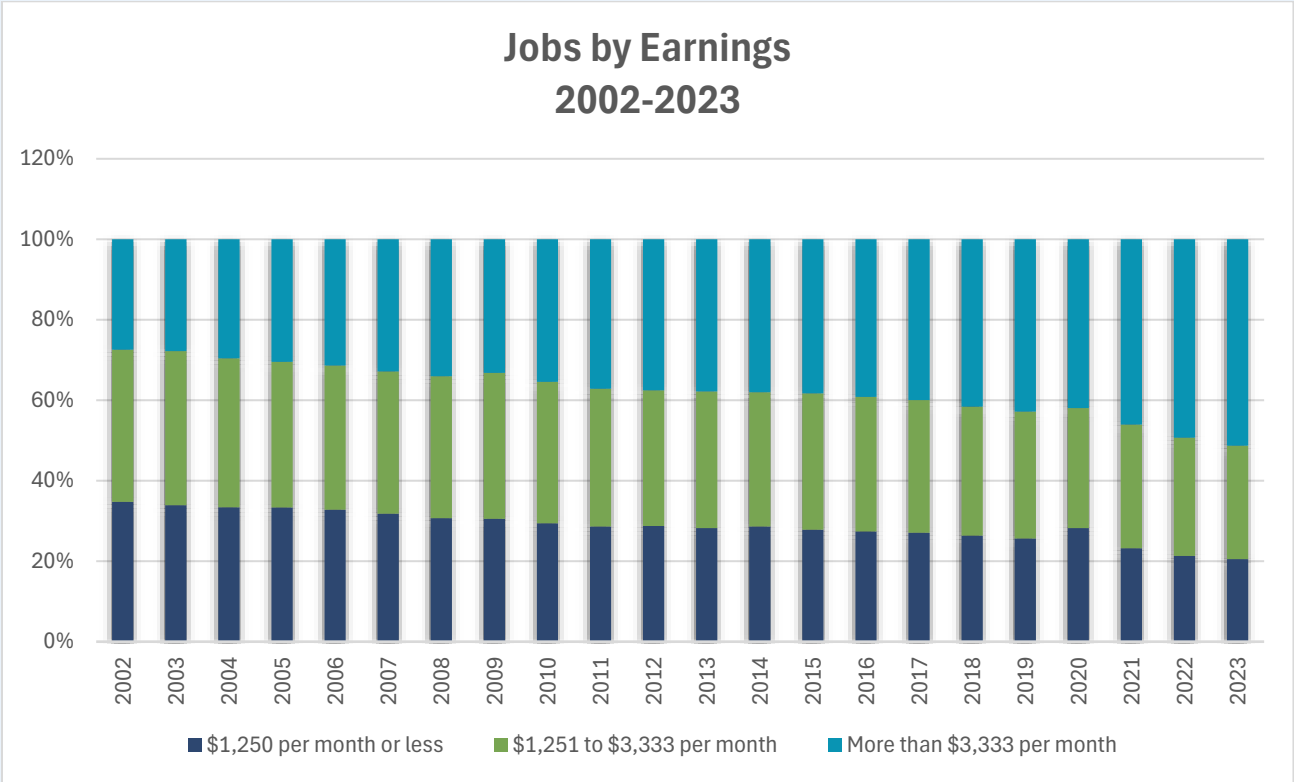


Figure 1-30: The total number of jobs in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties from 2002 to 2023.

	NIRPC (all jobs) (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), non-QCEW, self-employed and proprietors)	Chicago-Naperville- Elgin, IL-IN Metro Area (QCEW, non-QCEW, self-employed and proprietors)	Indiana (QCEW, non- QCEW, self-employed and proprietors)
Jobs, 2018	377,807	5,932,474	3,962,379
Jobs, 2023	399,365	6,211,128	4,218,876
Job change, 2018-2023	21,558	278,654	256,497
% Job change, 2018-2023	6%	5%	6%
Average total earnings per job, 2023	\$60,723	\$79,536	\$63,481
Cost of Living (COL)	93.8	103	95.6
COL Adjusted Average total earnings per job, 2023	\$64,737	\$77,220	\$66,403
Establishments, 2023	18,175	253,386	189,164
Sales, 2023	\$123.5 Billion	\$1559.5 Billion	\$973.1 Billion
Gross Regional Product (GRP), 2023	\$52.9 Billion	\$860.8 Billion	\$475.8 Billion
GRP per job, 2023	\$132,508	\$138,583	\$112,787
Exports per job, 2023	\$200,046	\$100,814	\$129,817
Total purchases, 2023	\$ 57.2 Billion	\$623.1 Billion	\$422.1 Billion
<i>Within region</i>	39.70%	69.80%	51%
<i>Imported from outside of state/region</i>	60.30%	30.20%	49%

Figure 1-31: Economic Performance Indicators from 2013 to 2018 from NIRPC's 2025 CEDS Update

MAJOR EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

A persistent regional development pattern in Northwest Indiana was identified in NIRPC's *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*. Mature inner cities and towns develop and gain population but then decline as newer housing is built in new communities or in unincorporated areas on the urban fringe. This leaves once thriving city centers with vacant lots and a dwindling tax base. To address these economic growth concerns, a regional urban framework was put forth to identify strategies to direct different levels of population and jobs into distinguished place types, including economic centers.

Figure 1-32 shows the job density for the region in 2013 and 2023. In 2013, only a few identified economic centers had an employment density of 6,000 jobs or more per square mile. This includes the economic center located in Hammond, east of downtown, that abuts Calumet City in Illinois. The other economic centers with a high employment density are located in Gary, north of 4th Ave, and at the intersection of I-65 and U.S. 30, next to the Southlake Mall, and in downtown La Porte.

In 2023, all of the economic centers identified above, as well as the center located in Crown Point between E North St. and Summit St., maintained an employment density of 6,000 jobs or more per square mile. Additionally, noticeable job density increases occurred in the southern portions of Portage and Chesterton, and also on the south side of Hobart around the St. Mary's Medical Center. Downtown Crown Point and Valparaiso also saw a consolidation and a slight increase in job density. Areas around major commercial centers along the Calumet Ave, Indianapolis Blvd., and Cline Ave. in Northwest Lake County also experienced increases in employment density.

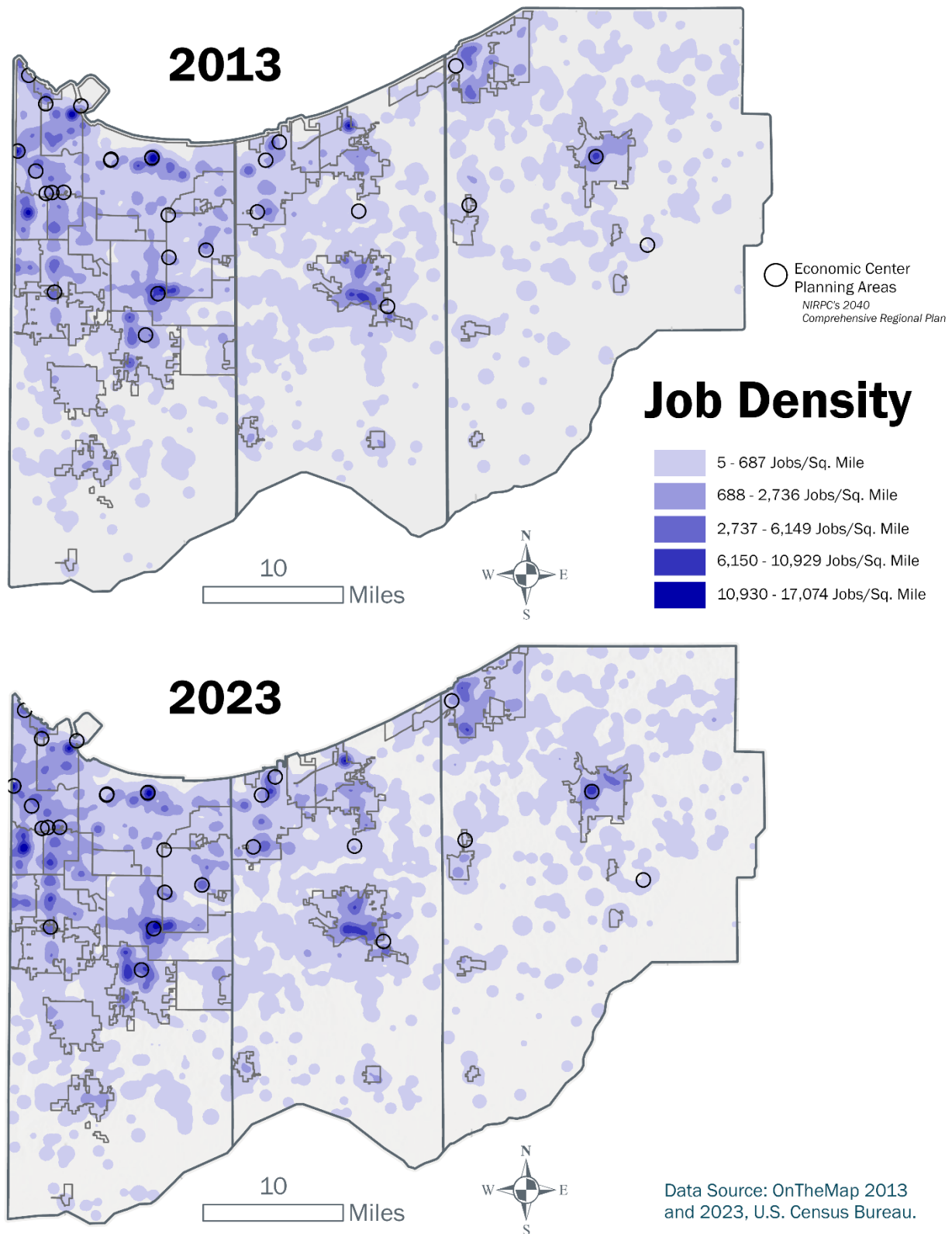


Figure 1-32: Employment density (jobs per square mile) in 2013 and 2023, overlaid with the economic center planning areas identified in NIRPC's 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.

Figure 1-33 shows that most of Northwest Indiana saw increased employment density from 2013 to 2023. East Chicago and the Leshwood/Brunswick neighborhood, just south of the Gary-Chicago International airport, have seen a decrease in the number of jobs available per square mile from 2013 to 2023. Also, the neighborhoods just east of downtown Gary and into the Aetna neighborhood saw a decrease in employment density. However, some of the highest employment densities are seen in areas of Gary and East Chicago. These major employment centers are in heavily industrialized areas along the lakeshore where major corporations like U.S. Steel, Cleveland-Cliffs, and BP own and operate mills, factories, and refineries.

Additionally, the Liverpool neighborhood and residential area surrounding the intersection of Wisconsin St. and 10th St. in Hobart experience a decrease in job density. Decreases also occurred in smaller neighborhoods located in north Valparaiso, Lowell, Hebron, and select neighborhoods on the outskirts of downtown Michigan City. A noticeable decrease also occurred at the old Purdue University North Central campus along U.S. 421 in La Porte County. The college campus now serves as Purdue University Northwest's second location, after the two universities consolidated into a single institution. It is assumed that most of the jobs associated with the Westville campus have been reassigned to the main campus in Hammond.

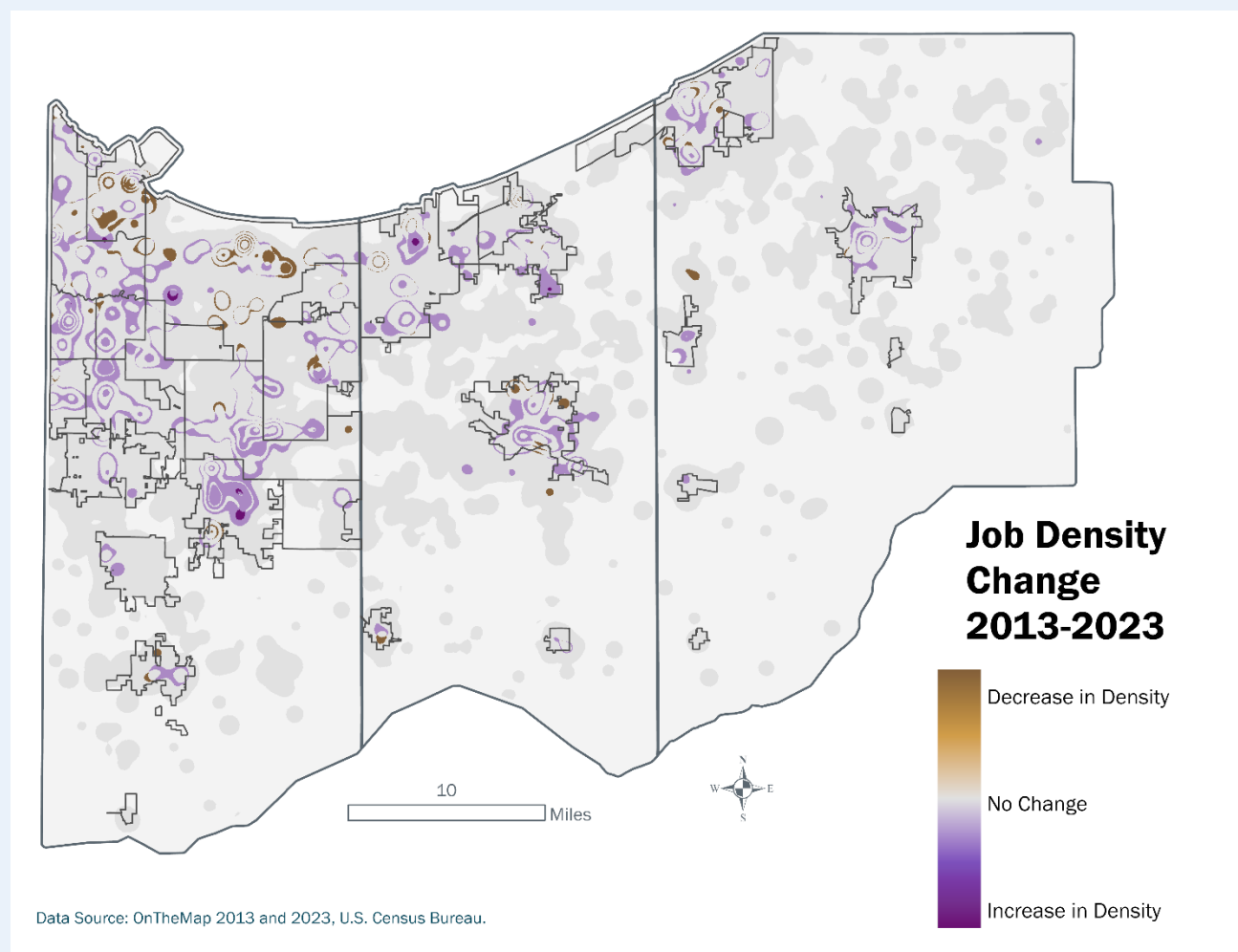


Figure 1-34: Employment density change from 2013 and 2023

FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS

On January 31, 2025, the Secretary of the Department of Transportation (DOT) issued an order that lists priorities for where DOT funding (i.e., grants, loans, contracts, etc.) will be distributed. This directive states that DOT policies, programs, and activities shall be administered to maximize benefits for families and communities. Benefits include, but are not limited to, increased access to economic opportunities and actions that help alleviate poverty, enhance safety, and primarily benefit families and communities by improving quality of life.

Following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14, first established in 1978, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses poverty rates determined at the census tract level to evaluate the depth and intensity of poverty in a neighborhood. Scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating lower exposure to poverty.

The most recently calculated poverty index for census tracts in Lake, Porter, and La Porte County can be seen in Figure 1-35. In Northwest Indiana, urban city centers often have a higher percentage of households that earn less than 60% of the area's median income. These urban centers are also areas that experience an increased exposure to poverty, particularly in Northern Lake County, Michigan City, and La Porte. Additionally, unincorporated Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties experience the lowest exposure to poverty based on the most recent HUD poverty index calculated using the 2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

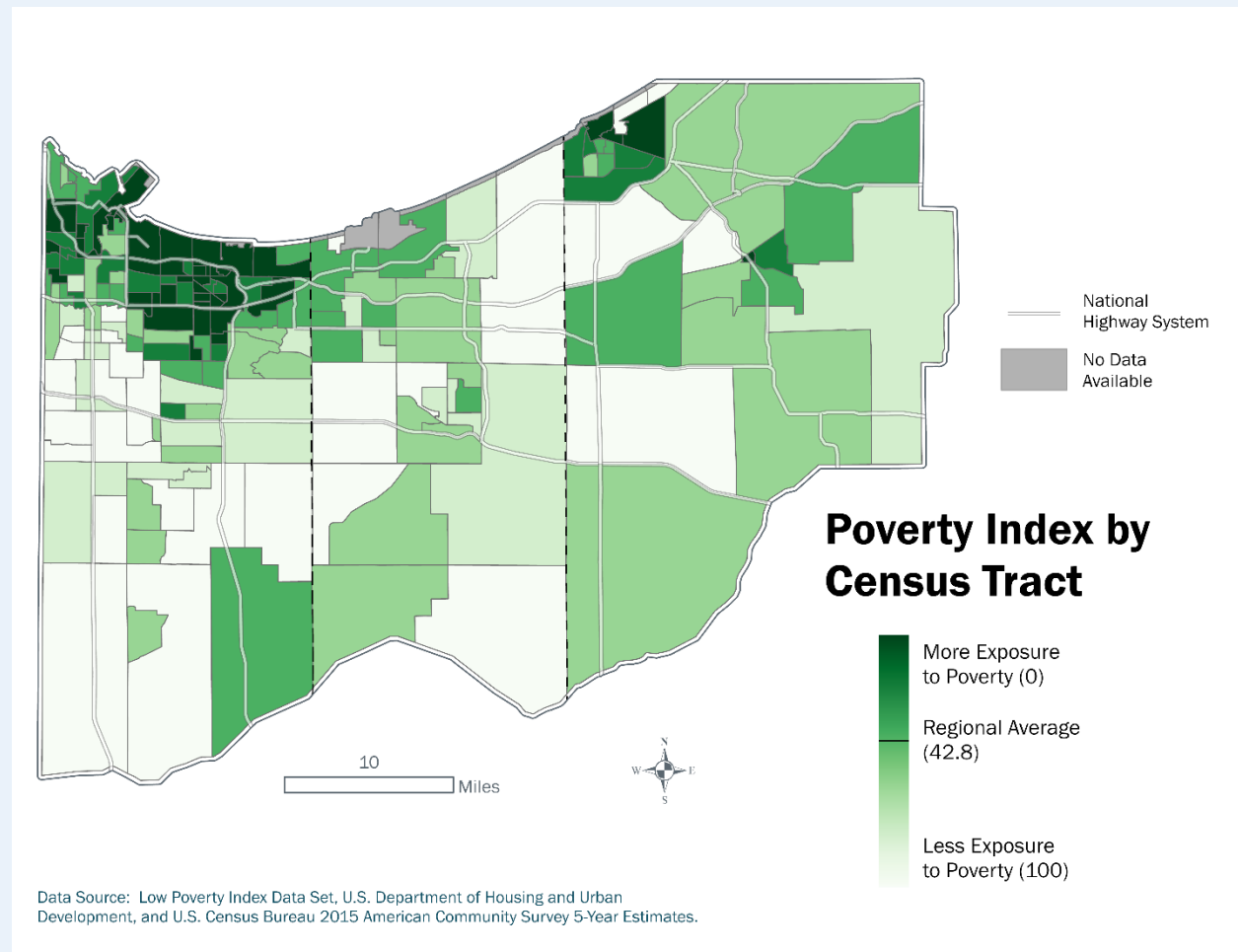


Figure 1-35: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Poverty Index for Lake, Porter, and La Porte County

Furthermore, DOT Order 2100.7, issued at the end of January 2025, also specifically states that DOT policies and activities do not adversely affect families and family-specific difficulties, such as the accessibility of transportation to families with young children, and give preference to communities with marriage and birth rates higher than the national average. In Northwest Indiana, Porter County has the highest married population, with 52.6% of the population over the age of 15 that is currently married. This is followed by La Porte County at 46.2%, and Lake County at 44.5%. The American Community Survey 2024 5-year estimates show that the average of the U.S. population that is married is approximately 47.8%. Figure 1-36 shows the percentage of the population that is married by Census block groups within Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties. Using the block group geography allows for a neighborhood-based analysis of where married populations are located.

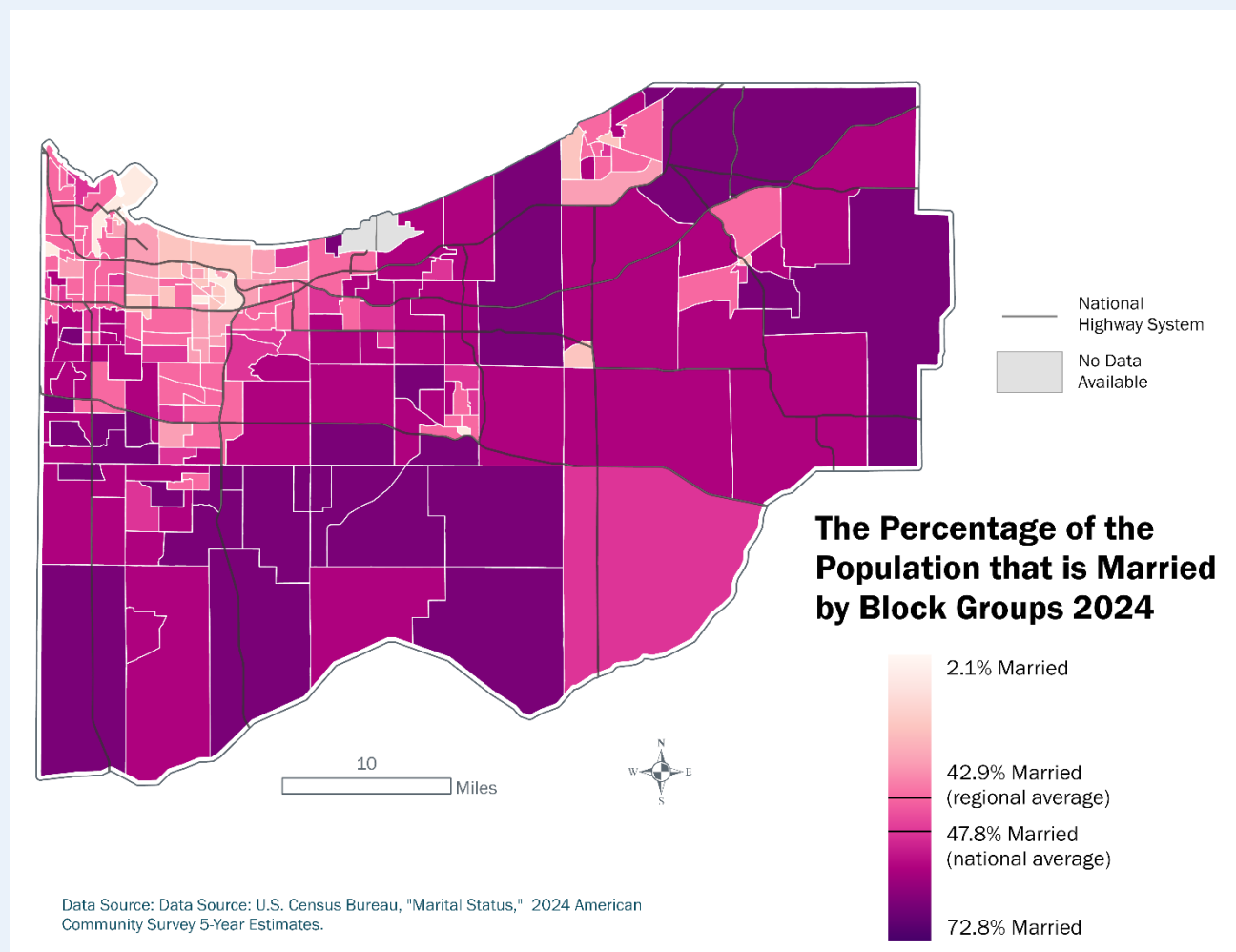


Figure 1-36: The married population in Lake, Porter, and La Porte County

The youth population in Northwest Indiana in 2024 was also examined to identify priority areas as directed by DOT Order 2100.7. In the United States, approximately 24.1% of the population is 18 years old or younger. In Northwest Indiana, about 21.8% of the population is 18 years old or younger. The darker orange colors in Figure 1-37 show areas that have a greater youth population than the regional average. Communities with a youth population above the regional average are prevalent in high-density residential communities.

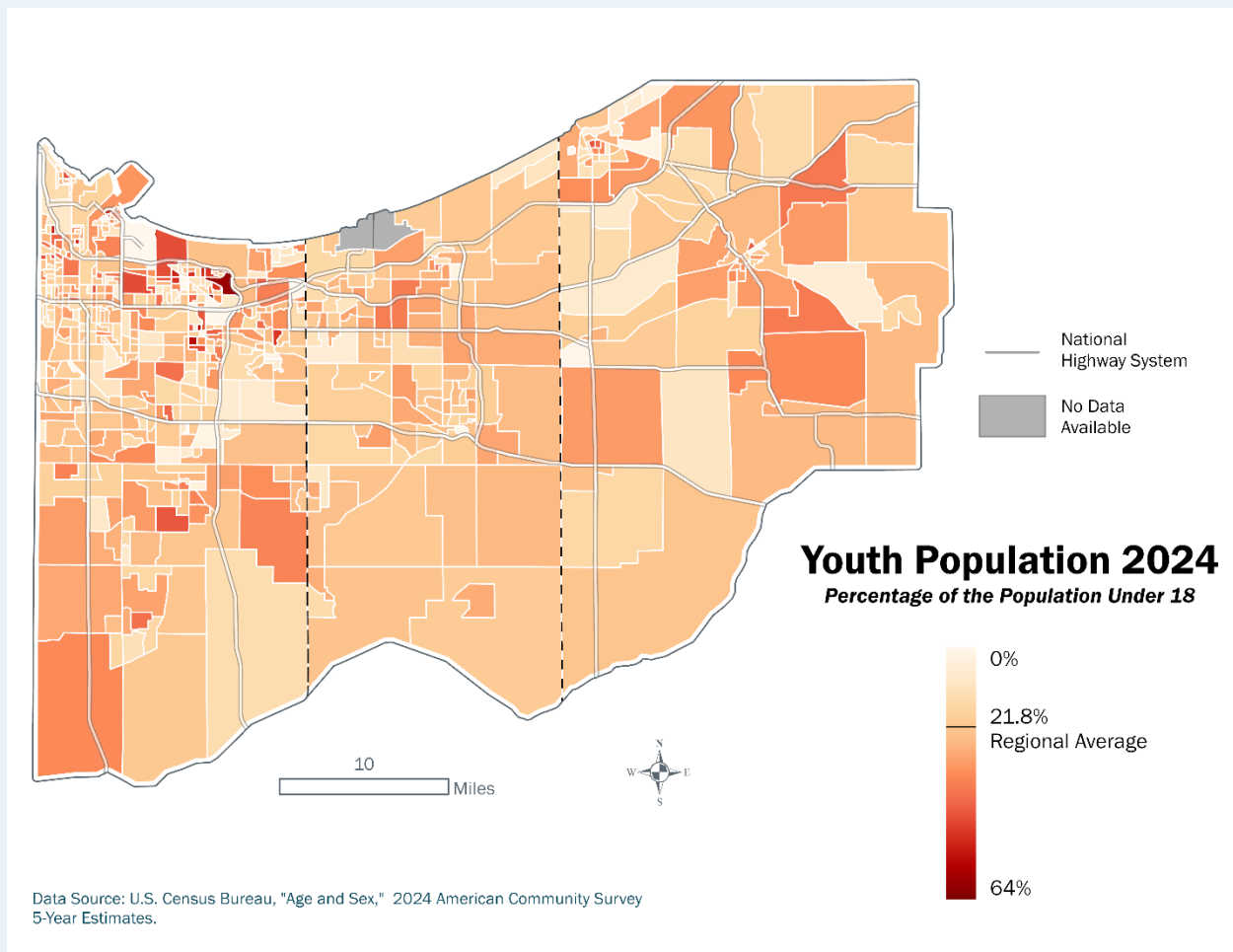


Figure 1-37: The population 18 years old and younger in Lake, Porter, and La Porte County in 2024

2- ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950's, communities throughout the United States have tailored their development patterns to the automobile, which in turn has significantly diminished pedestrian and bicycle transportation options. However, over the last 30-plus years, the NIRPC region of Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties have seen a growing network of alternative transportation opportunities.

The core of this growth has been in the purchase and development of abandoned railroad corridors into multi-use trails. These routes take advantage of old corridors that contributed to the rise of NW Indiana. The proximity of Chicago and the location of Lake Michigan meant over 1,000 miles of railroad existed in the region by the end of the 19th Century.

Over time, approximately 300 miles of this railroad network became abandoned, primarily in the 1970's and 1980's. This national phenomenon led to the "rails-to-trails" movement and became more pronounced with the passage of federal funding specifically mandated for developing off-road trails in the early 1990's. Since then, NIRPC has successfully allocated its attributable federal funds to establish a network of over 200 miles of trails spanning all three counties (see Figure 2-1).

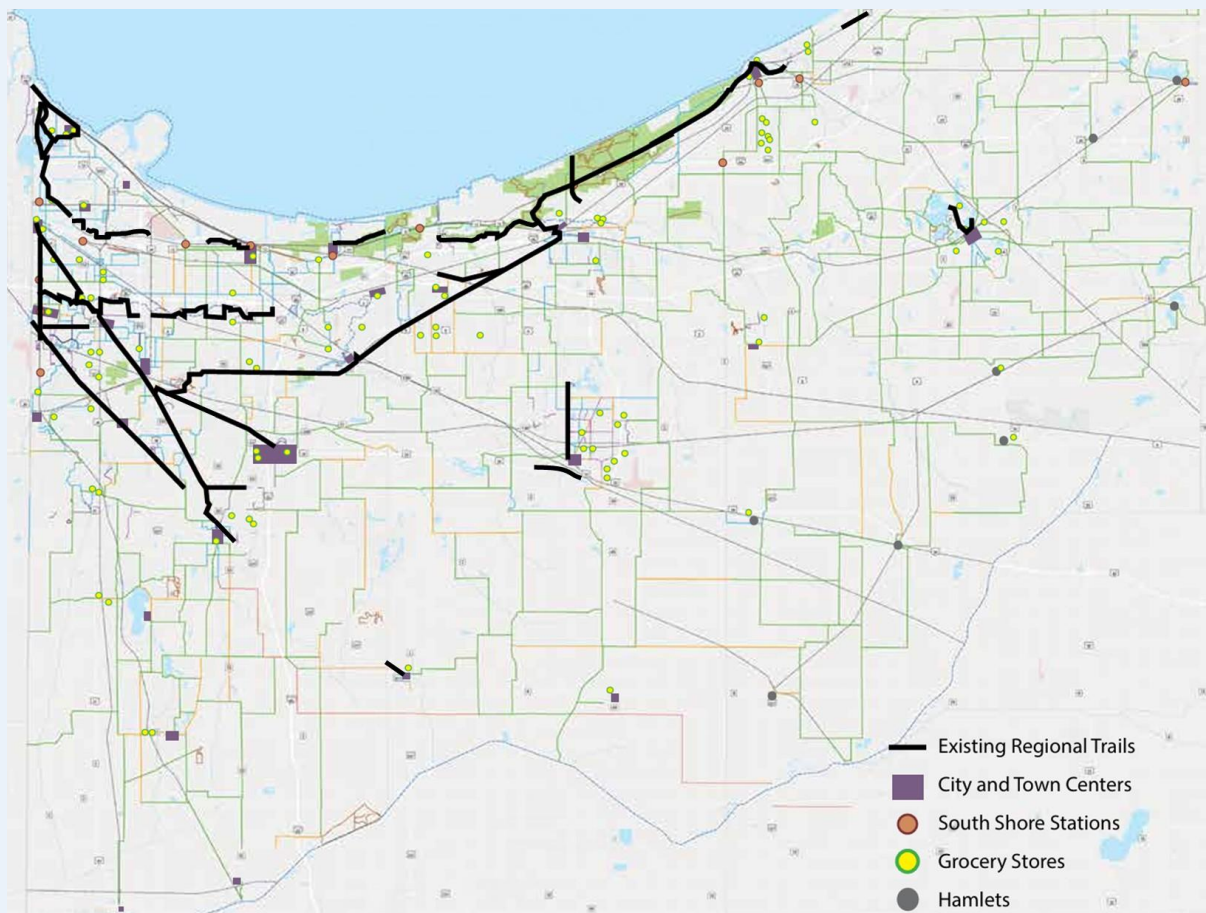


Figure 2-1: Trail Network in 2026

The main instrument guiding the allocation of these funds was the Regional Priority Corridors Map, which was first established in the 1990's. This map identified a number of potential trail corridors in the region, including abandoned rail properties, utility corridors, riparian corridors, and highways between population centers. This map has been revised many times over the years to reflect the shifting priorities of municipalities. The most current version is shown in Figure 2-2.

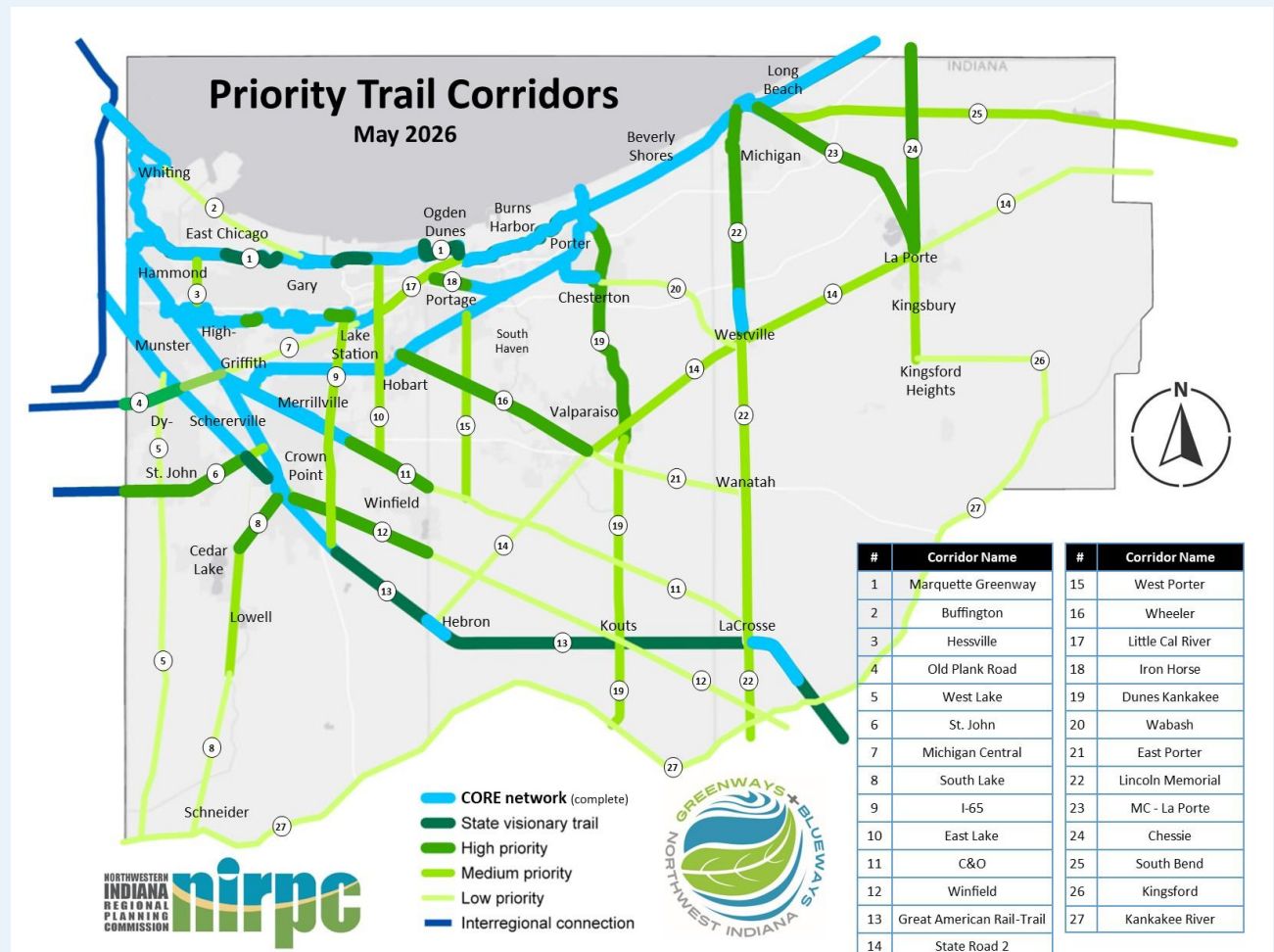


Figure 2-2: Priority Trail Corridors

As critical off-road trails are, they must be augmented with a comprehensive network of local connections to provide safe opportunities to access a host of destinations. The primary focus is on a sidewalk system that provides reliable connections and on streets that safely accommodate bicycle travel. Although every street except interstate highways is legal for bicycle travel, some routes are not suitable due to vehicular congestion and high-speed limits.

However, many streets throughout the region are safe for bicycle travel. Many of these are residential with low vehicular volumes and speed limits and sidewalks on either side. Streets with higher traffic volumes and speeds can accommodate cyclists with protected bike lanes, sidepaths, or cycle tracks to provide safe separation of users.

NIRPC has encouraged local policies toward these street conversions since 2010, with the first adoption of our Complete Streets Policy and Guidelines. In 2020, these were updated into a Living Streets policy, which included green infrastructure improvements for stormwater management and landscaping (street trees). For all NIRPC attributable funds, this policy must be adhered to the most practicable extent possible.

In *NWI 2050+*, both trails and on-road improvements were integrated into the first Active Transportation Network map (see Figure 2-3). This ambitious vision proposed 47 corridors connecting all parts of the region and identifying improvements needed in each to facilitate safe pedestrian and bicycle travel. Each corridor was divided into segments that highlighted street type, road width, nearby destinations, and barriers. It concluded with recommended infrastructure improvements for each corridor segment.

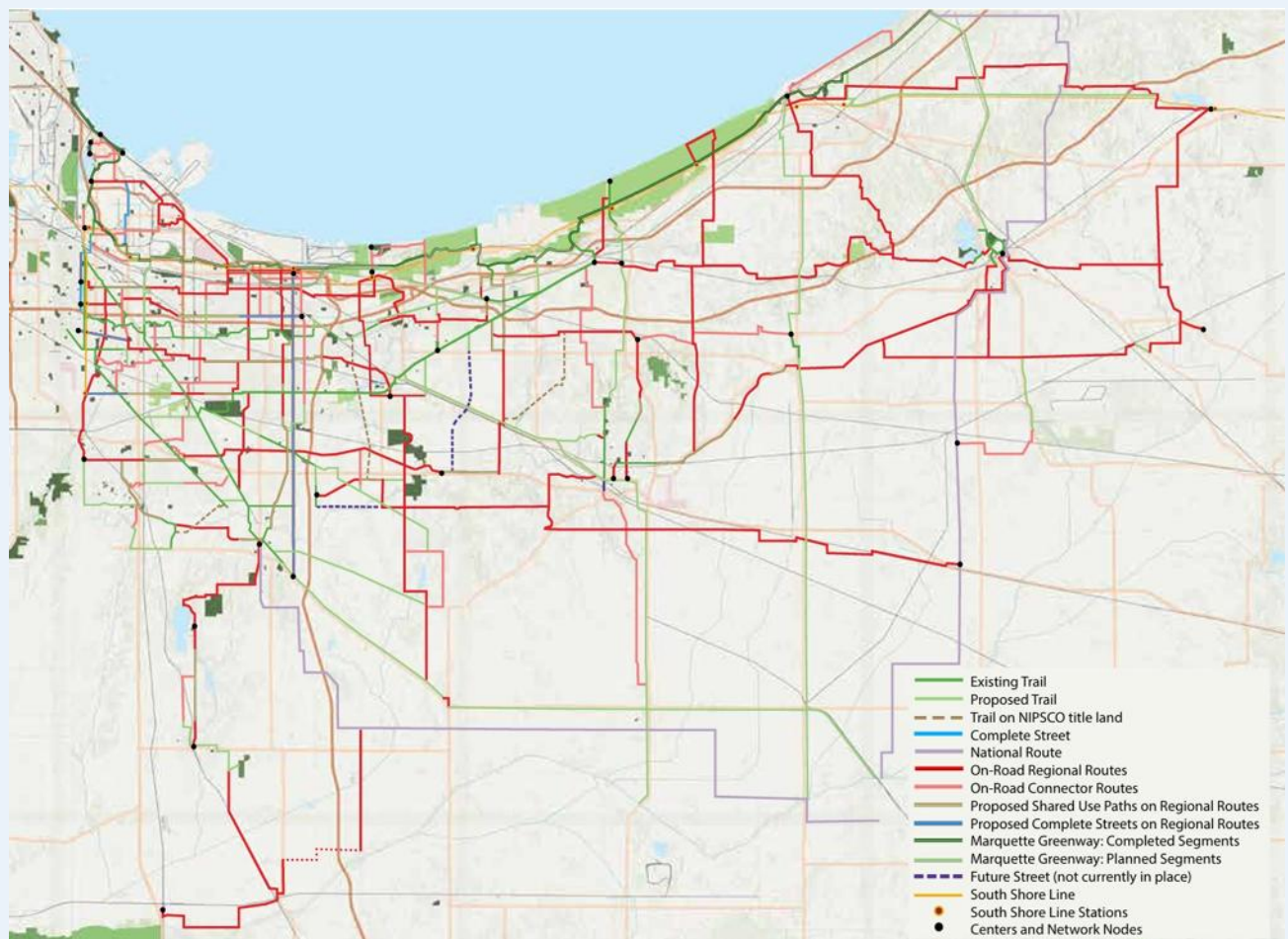


Figure 2-3: Active Transportation Network

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

In the *NWI 2050* and *2050+* plans, performance measures were identified to help establish baselines and track progress on the active transportation network in the NIRPC region. The following provides updates to these measures.

Miles of Regional Off-road Paved Trails

One of the best success stories in our region has been the exponential growth of our regional trail network. As described in the introduction, many miles of former abandoned rail corridors have been converted into trails, which in turn have created a non-motorized “superhighway” of routes that aid connections to all parts of the NIRPC region.

Figure 2-4 clearly demonstrates this astonishing growth since 1990, when only 13 miles of off-road trail existed. As of April 2026, this number has grown to 210 miles, with approximately 30 miles funded for imminent development. Progress on the system has been primarily supported by NIRPC federal funds and funds provided by the State of Indiana. Most recently, this has included the popular Next Level Trails program, which distributed \$180 million across Indiana from 2019 to 2024.

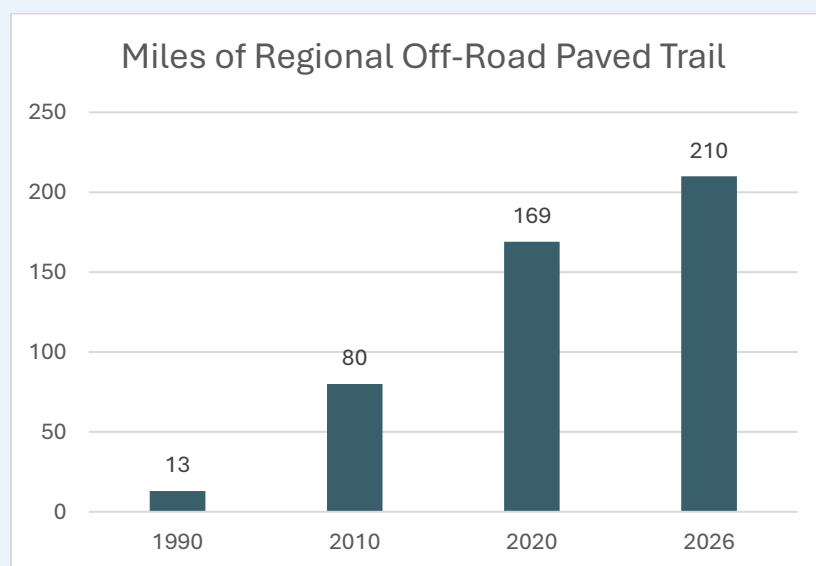


Figure 2-4

Off-road trails continue to be popular as more communities recognize their tremendous, unparalleled quality-of-life benefits. These include improved health, environmental enhancement, and economic development attraction. Many opportunities still exist, with only 150 of the 300 miles of abandoned rail corridors developed as off-road trails to date.

Further growth will be aided by continued partnerships with corridors owned by the Northern Indiana Public Service Corporation (NIPSCO), the South Shore Line, and INDOT rights-of-way.

Number of People Using Regional Trails

Over the last decade, NIRPC has deployed over 60 counters on various trails corridors. These have included two generations of technology. In 2017, 20 TrafX counters were purchased and installed. In 2024, an additional 30 counters were purchased from EcoCounter which provided a fuller picture of trail usage as shown in Figure 2-5. A combined number of nearly 1.5 million have been counted between the summer of 2025 and 2026. NIRPC intends to install additional counters by the end of 2026 which will provide additional data on trail usage.

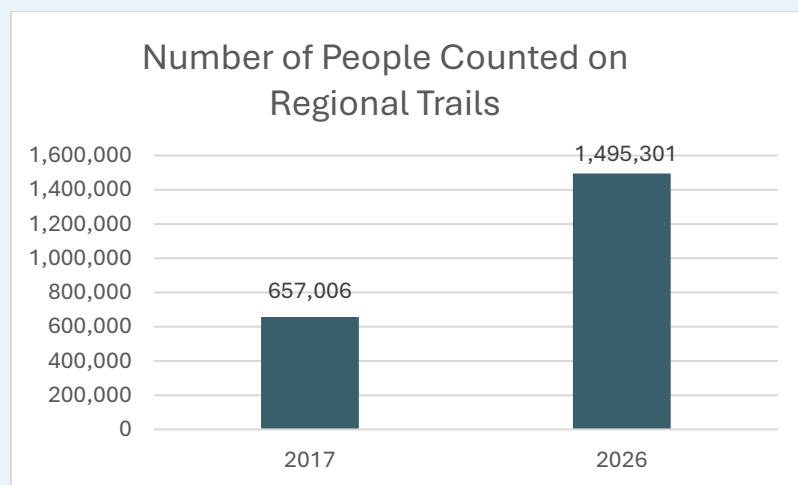


Figure 2-5

Miles of Bike Lanes

Beyond trails, a focus on expanding the non-motorized network includes improving our existing street network to safely accommodate bicycle users. A top treatment is the installation of bike lanes, and since 2018, there has been very modest progress on this front. Figure 2-6 details the number increasing from 2.5 miles to the current estimate of 17.9 miles in the three-county region. Although not every street is wide enough to paint lanes, this number still barely registers compared to the number of streets that can accommodate these improvements.

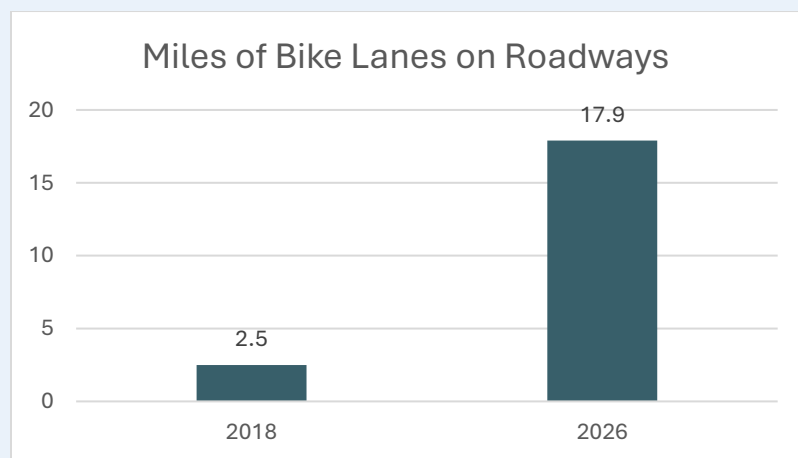


Figure 2-6

Percent of Population within ¼-mile Network Distance to a Trail or Bicycle Facility

As the trail and bike lane network grows, so does the number of people living within a quarter mile of these facilities, as demonstrated in Figure 2-7. This distance has been used since those living close enough to safe non-motorized options are more likely to utilize them. This, in turn, results in more people using trails and safe streets to access shopping, employment, and schools.

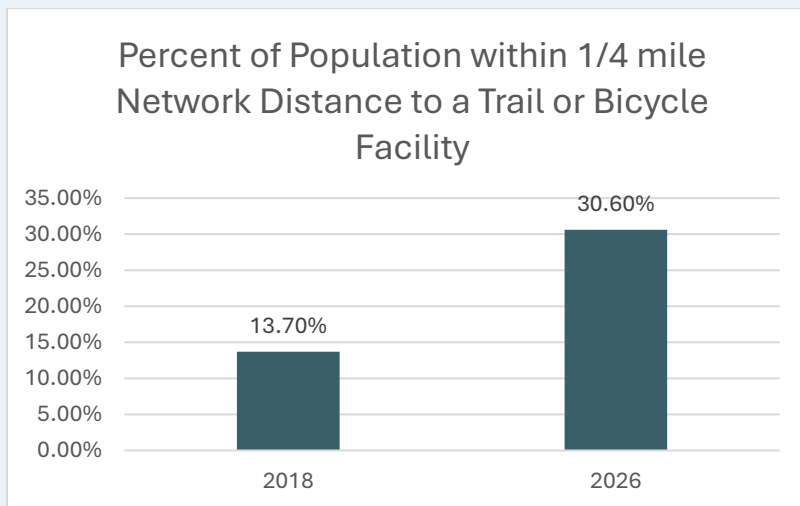


Figure 2-7

Percent of Population within ¼-mile Network Distance to a Trail or Bicycle Facility Crossing Municipal/County Jurisdictions

It remains critical that our non-motorized networks access neighboring communities to provide true alternative transportation options. Again, with the continuing increase of trail mileage regionwide, more people can take advantage of inter-jurisdictional connectivity, as shown in Figure 2-8.

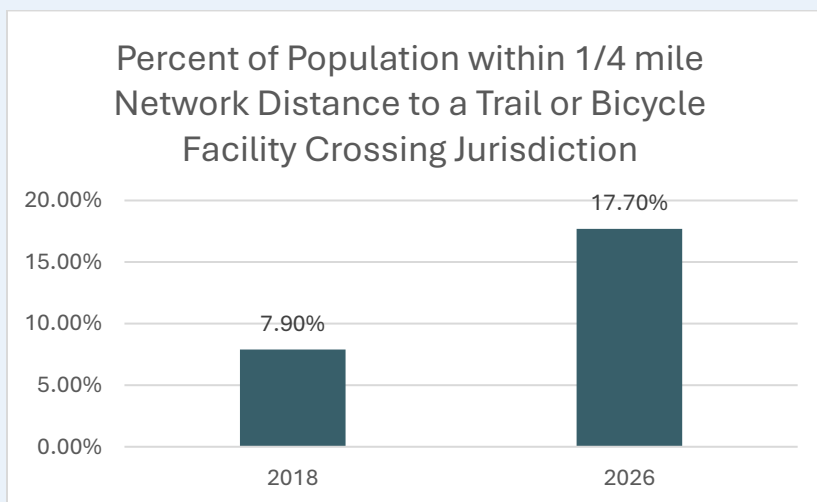


Figure 2-8

Number of Non-motorized Serious Injuries and Fatalities

Our heavy reliance upon the automobile has created an incredibly unsafe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists to negotiate. In addition to heavy congestion and speeding, over the last two decades, the number of accidents attributed to distracted driving has skyrocketed. In response to the rise in traffic fatalities, “Vision Zero” campaigns have proliferated throughout the United States. These involve a series of locally based policies that aim to improve the safety of all intended users of the roadway, by installing infrastructure, and increasing enforcement of distracted driving laws. Combined, these have proven successful, and NIRPC aims to incorporate them into future planning initiatives.

As demonstrated in Figure 2-9, with the increase in trails and other non-motorized facilities, our region has seen a drop in injuries and fatalities since 2018, even as more people use trails (see Figure 2-5).

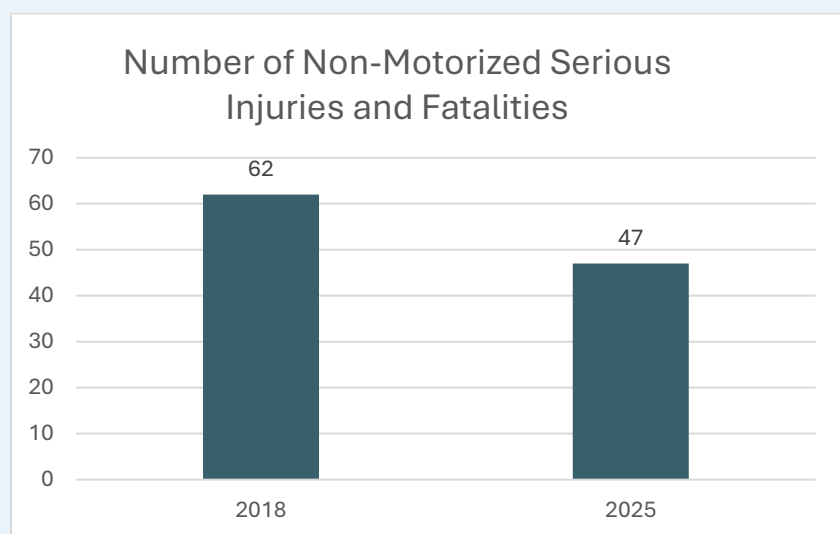


Figure 2-9 (source ARIES Crash Data)

Percent of Adults Reporting Physical Inactivity

Over the last 30 years, the number of Americans experiencing obesity has grown significantly and physical activity has decreased. Our built environment has made non-motorized movement challenging, with very few people doing daily errands or going to work on foot or by bike.

Figure 2-10 shows the challenges our region still faces as physical inactivity levels continue to rise. Significant improvements in the region's non-motorized network can help facilitate the use of active transportation for commuting, recreation, and other daily travel.

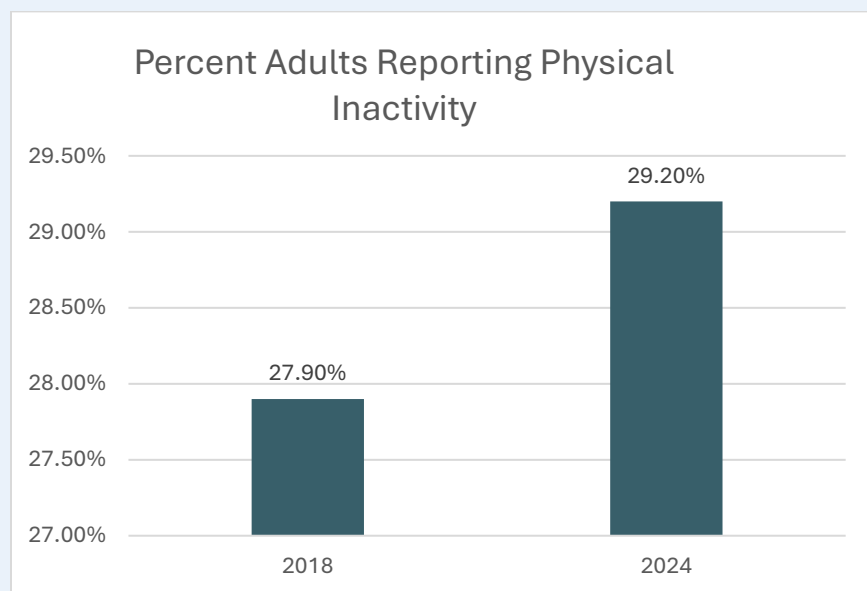


Figure 2-10 (source – Indianaindicators.org)

3- LAND USE & HOUSING

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The land use and housing performance measures are used to evaluate development policies' impact on growth management, housing affordability, coordination of land use and transportation, and quality of life. Track density per acre, proximity to transit, and proximity to main centers.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Performance Measure: Change in developed land in the last 10 years.

This measure monitors new developments within urban and unincorporated areas, tracking changes over time that reflect shifts in economic value, environmental impact, and infrastructure efficiency. It uses GIS-based tools and USGS land cover data from 2014 to 2024. Additionally, it enables planners to analyze long-term trends and make informed predictions. Figure 3-1 indicates a 5% increase in developed land and a 1% increase in open space over 10 years. Agricultural land and open water both decreased by 3%. Figure 3-2 shows the land cover classifications in more detail.

Developed land increased by 5%, about 19 Sq miles, in 10 years. Most of the increase is attributable to developed open space and low-intensity development.

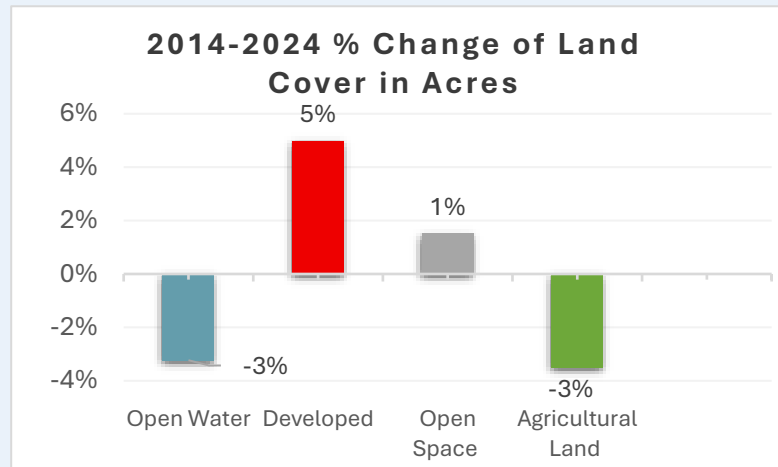
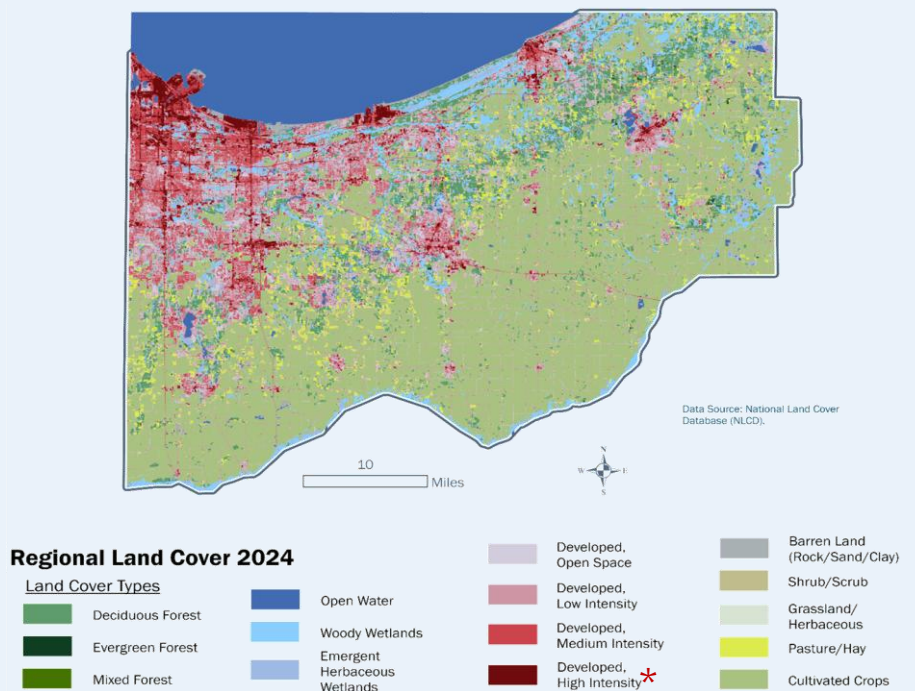


Figure 3-1 Land Cover Change 2014-2024



* "Developed Open Space" in land cover classification (NLCD) includes areas with less than 20% constructed materials and managed vegetation like lawns, parks, golf courses, and cemeteries.

Figure 3-2

Performance Measure: Loss of agricultural land and open space

This measure reflects the growth of suburban areas and the establishment of nonfarm homes or other developments in agricultural areas, open space, and forest land. Deforestation threatens the region's diverse wildlife habitats and can also affect drainage and soil erosion patterns (Figure 3-3).

Performance Measure: Change in managed and protected land:

Northwest Indiana residents, employees, and visitors should be able to access natural areas and green spaces that are maintained and protected from future development.

Managed lands in Northwest Indiana include state fish and wildlife areas, nature preserves, restored prairies, and Shirley Heinze properties, managed by the DNR, The Nature Conservancy, and local land trusts, with a focus on habitat restoration, wildlife protection, and public recreation.

As shown in Figure 3-4, managed lands in Northwest Indiana increased by about 13% over 13 years.

Between 2010 and 2023, several organizations added significant acreage of managed lands in Northwest Indiana. These additions focus on protecting wetlands, river corridors, oak savannas, and biodiversity, and on providing recreational activities, such as the Marquette Greenway. The Indiana Dunes National Park acquired land in Porter and Lake counties. Meadowbrook Nature Preserve in Porter County received 73 acres in 2024, bringing its total protected acreage to 300. Since 2013, the Little Calumet River Conservation Corridor partners have secured 1900 acres. LaPorte County approved a 39-acre site for the Seibert Woods Nature Preserve. In Lake County, the Sundew Prairie added about 25 acres.

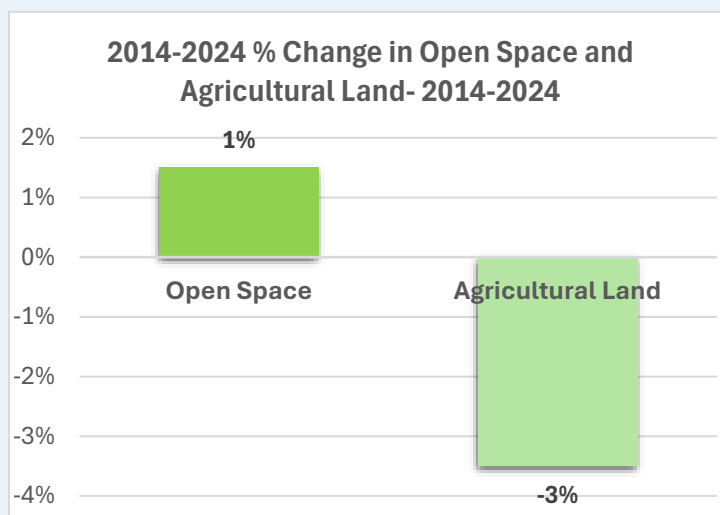


Figure 3-3

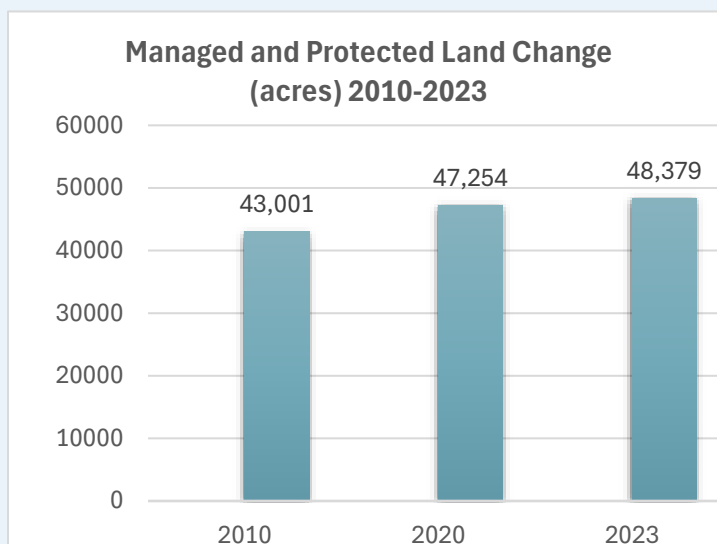


Figure 3-4

GROWTH RATE

Performance Measure: Population growth.

NWI 2050+ set a realistic annual population growth rate goal of 0.55%. Figure 3-5 shows a significant increase in population approaching the 0.55% goal between 2023 and 2025.

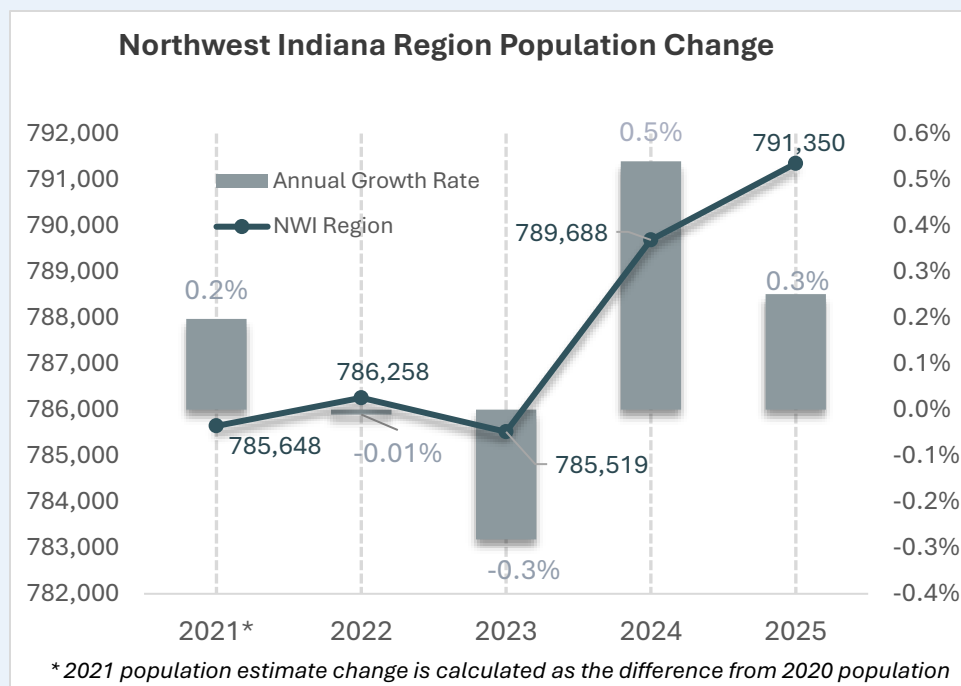


Figure 3-5

Performance Measure: Housing increases towards the NWI 2050+ goal.

The annual housing growth rate target in NWI 2050+ is 4%. Figure 3-6 shows that Porter County has a strong housing market, with a 6% growth rate. Although more new housing units have been built in Lake County, the growth rate shows a moderate increase of 3% over 10 years. Although more new housing units have been built in Lake County, the growth rate shows a moderate increase of 3% over 10 years. Meanwhile, the number of housing units in La Porte County increased by about 2%.

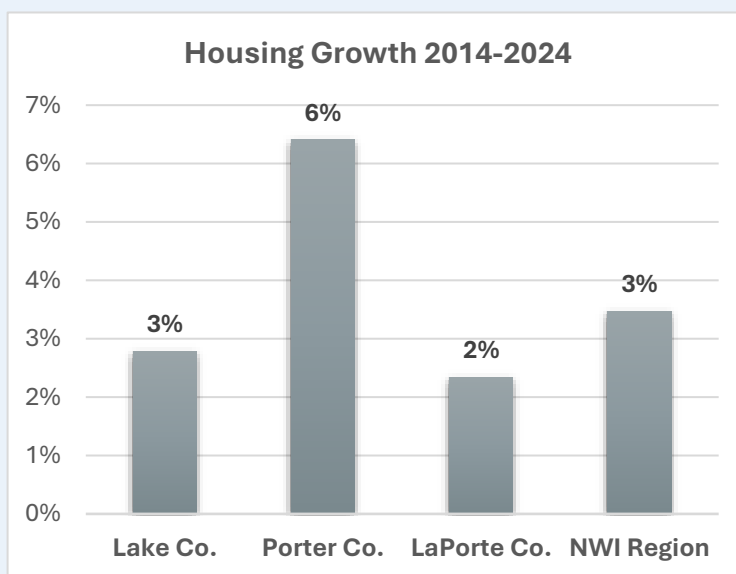


Figure 3-6

Performance Measure: Middle housing development in the last 10 years

Per NWI 2050+, single-family housing accounts for about 77% of total housing units; meanwhile, middle housing, which includes 2- to 5- unit residential buildings of various types, can to be increased and promoted by creating new land-use categories that allow higher densities while requiring smaller building sizes in walkable areas. Figure 3-7 shows housing permits for Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties between 2013 and 2023. The highest share of middle housing permits was in LaPorte County, at 25%.

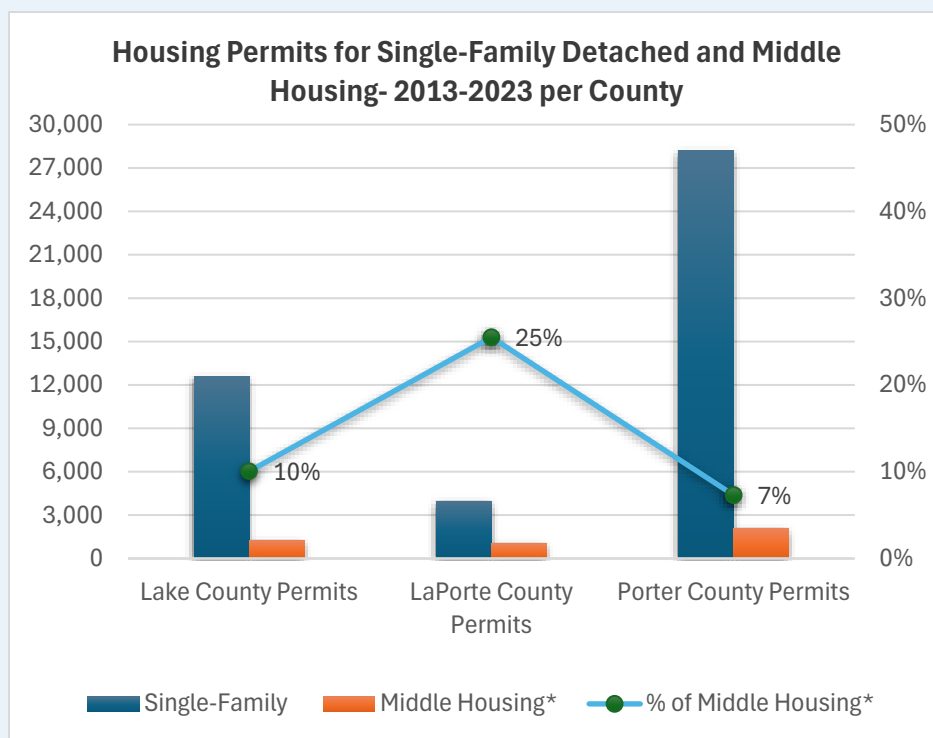


Figure 3-7

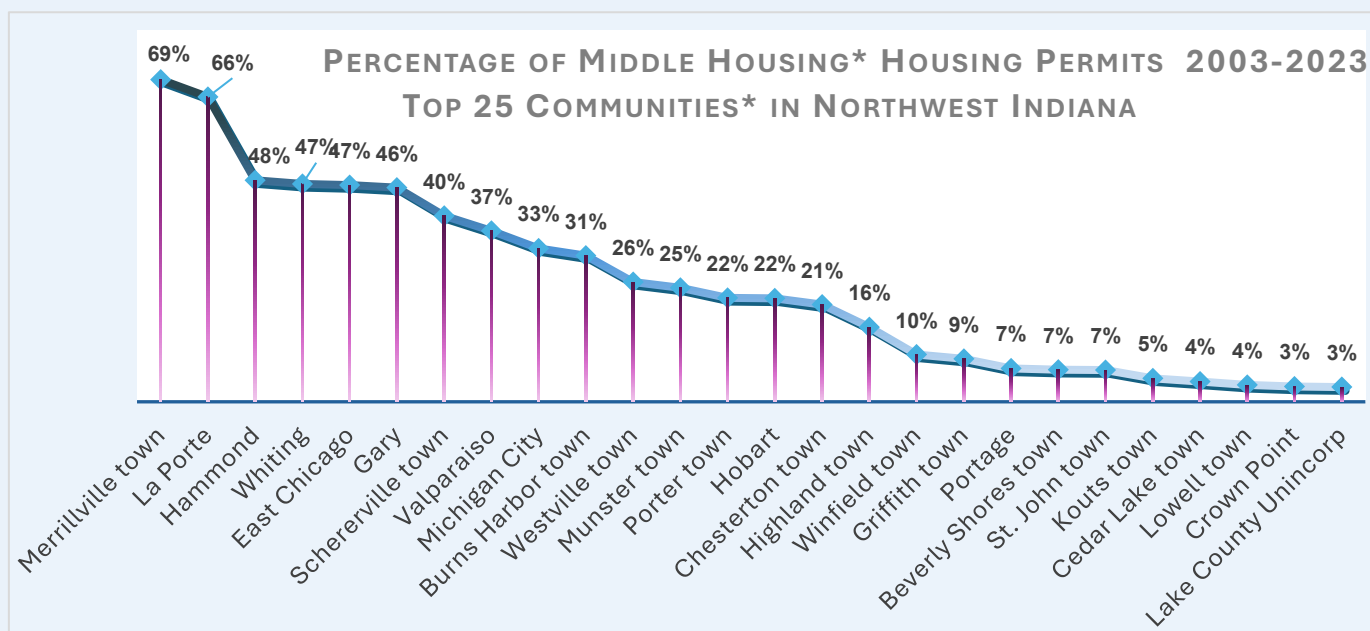


Figure 3-8: Housing Permits 2003-2023

The lack of multifamily developments in Northwest Indiana means there is little available inventory in the rent ranges that are in demand. Figure 3-8 shows the percentage of middle housing permits over 20 years, indicating that a significant number of large urban communities have permitted more middle housing. Figure 3-9 shows the distribution of housing types in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties.

Lake County, including municipalities, has the highest share of middle housing and multi-family units, with about 28%.

Lake County	Total Housing Units	Middle Housing	Multi-Family 10-20+ Units	Single- Family Units
	214,082	40,246	18,896	154,940
% of Total		19%	9%	72%

Porter County	Total Housing Units	Middle Housing 2-5+ Units	Multi-Family 10-20+ Units	Single-Family Units Detached
	69,391	10,327	4,762	54,302
% of Total		15%	7%	78%

LaPorte County	Total Housing Units	Middle Housing	Multi-Family 10-20+ Units	Single-Family Units Detached
	47,157	5,840	3,030	39,041
% of Total		12%	6%	83%

Figure 3-9: Lake, Porter, LaPorte counties Housing Type Share

Source: 2024 Census Estimate Housing Data in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte

In the U.S., single-family detached housing accounts for about 61% of the housing market, while multifamily housing accounts for about 33%. As shown in Figure 3-10, in Indiana, these figures are 73% and 23%, respectively. However, in Northwest Indiana, single-family detached housing accounts for about 78% of the housing stock. Only 23% of the

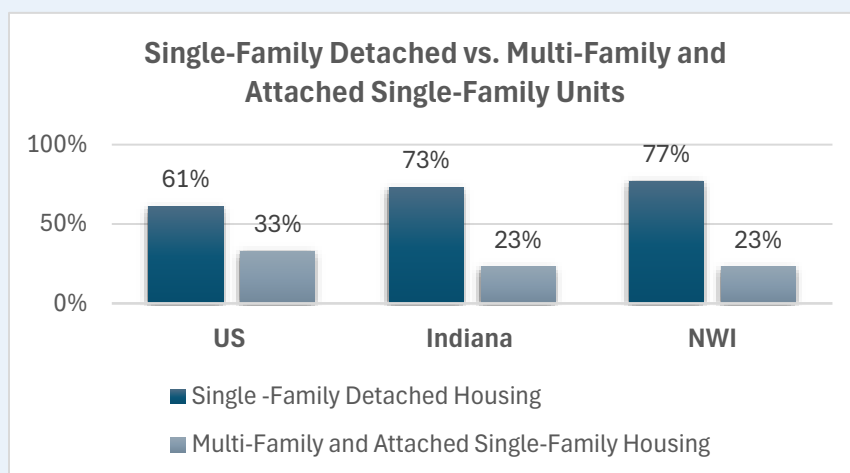


Figure 3-10: Regional housing share by housing type - U.S. Census

region's housing stock consists of multifamily units, duplexes, and townhomes. NIRPC's housing affordability analysis indicates that wealthier households are occupying housing units within the price range of moderate-income households, resulting in housing scarcity for new or moderate-income households.

Figure 3-11 shows an approximately 6% loss of middle housing units between 2020 and 2024, with the largest increase in the 10 -20 multifamily units, by about 20%.

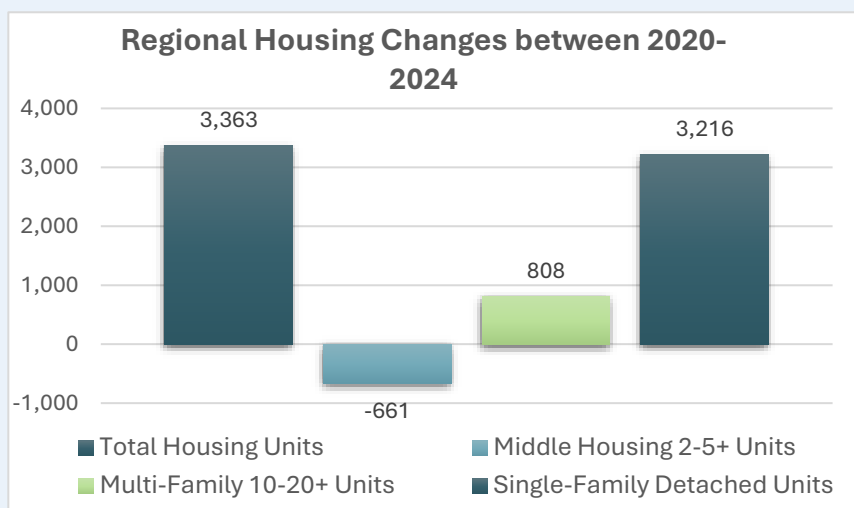


Figure 3-11: Regional housing share changes by housing type 2020-2024

Performance Measure: Percent of Households Burdened by Housing Costs (>30% of household income spent on housing)

The federal government classifies a household as housing cost burdened when it spends more than 30% of its gross income on rent or mortgage payments and utilities. If a household spends over 50% of its income, it is considered severely burdened. As Figure 3-13 indicates, approximately 26.5% of homeowners with mortgages in Indiana spend 30% or more of their household income on monthly housing costs. For renters, the burden is even higher, with about half paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs as supply shortages drive up prices.

The table below indicates that the northwest Indiana region has a lower percentage of homeowners who pay more than 30% of their household income than the state average. However, about 50% or more of households that rent are cost burdened, which is higher than the state average.

Households paying 30% or more of their income on mortgage			
Indiana State	Lake County	Porter County	LaPorte County
26.5%	21%	22%	21%

Households spending 30% or more of their income on monthly rent			
Indiana State	Lake County	Porter County	LaPorte County
47%	51%	49%	45%

Figure 3-12: Percentage of Households Burdened by Housing Cost

The housing price-to-income ratio is a common measure of housing affordability, comparing housing costs to people's incomes.

Performance Measure: Housing supply vs. demand (affordability-based prices)

Supply and demand for housing at different price affordability tiers are mismatched in Northwest Indiana, as there is little available inventory in the affordable rent ranges that are in demand.

There are two significant issues: supply and affordability. In Lake County (Figure 3-13), analysis shows a need for more affordable housing for households earning under \$25,000, as new construction does not address this need. Substantial subsidies would be necessary to construct more housing in this price range, as the market does not cater to this income bracket. Affordable options exist for households earning \$25,000-\$49,000 in older homes. Households earning \$50,000-\$99,999 also have a sufficient housing supply. However, there is a housing shortage for households earning \$100,000-\$200,000 and those earning more than \$200,000. In Porter County (Figure 3-15), as shown in the chart, there is still a shortage in the household income categories of less than \$25,000, \$100,000-\$199,000, and more than \$200,000. LaPorte County (Figure 3-16) shows a housing shortage in the under \$25,000-\$50,000 income range. It also shows a significant shortage in the \$100,000-\$199,000 and \$200,000+ household income categories. More expensive housing could motivate some households to upgrade, but financial constraints may prevent others from doing so. Offering a wide range of housing options could alleviate the issue.

Northwest Indiana continued to face an income-based housing shortage, with a shortage of over 25,652 units, about 8% compared to the region's current housing units.

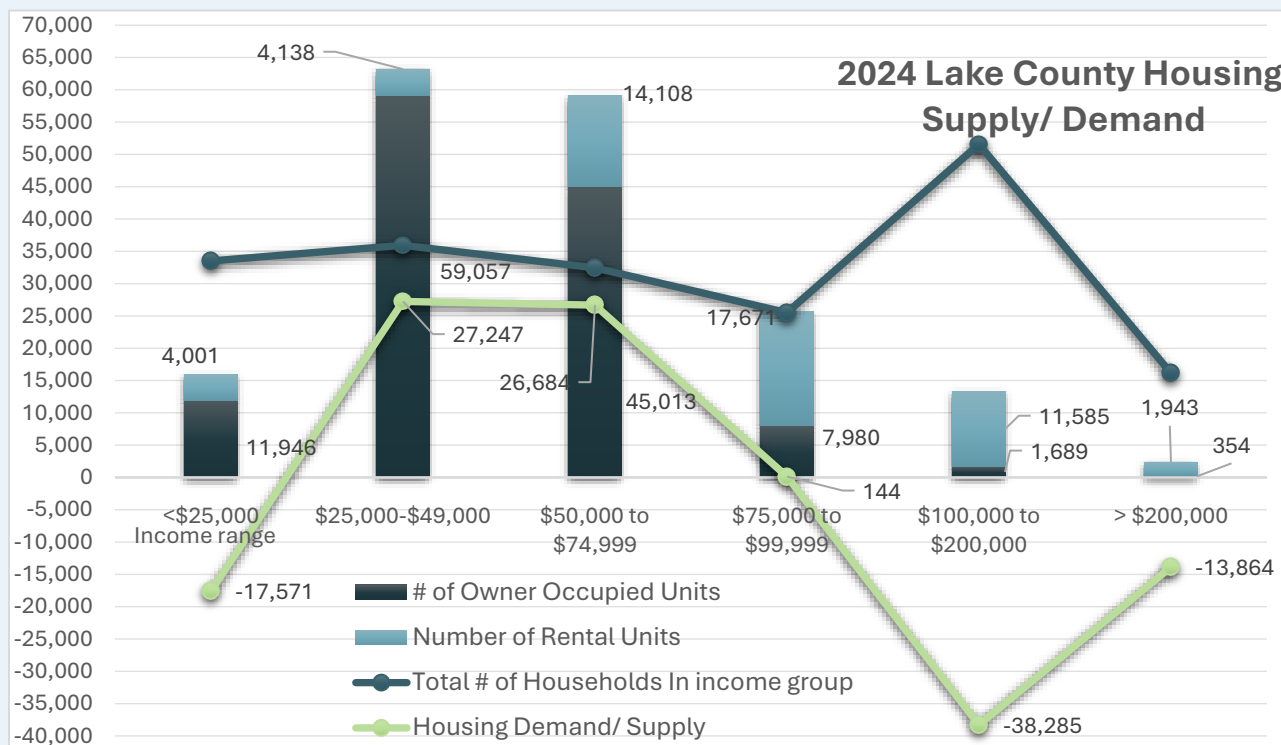


Figure 3-13

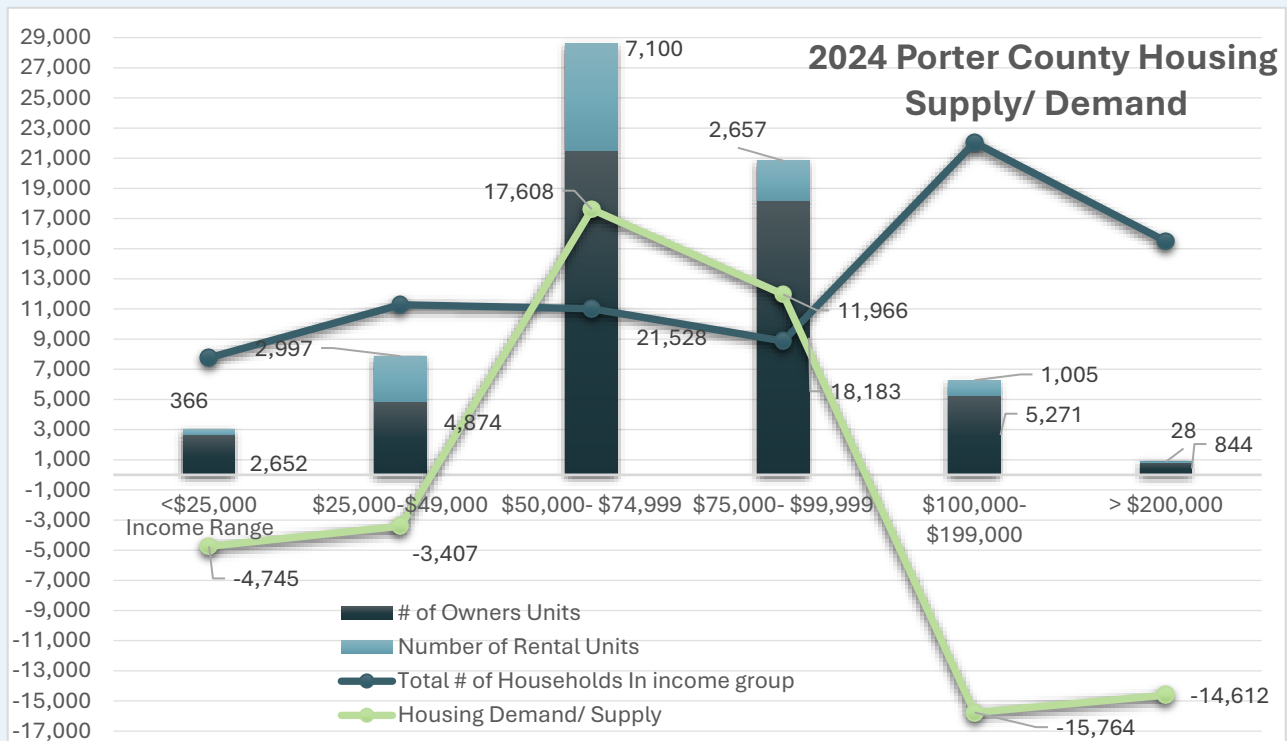


Figure 3-14

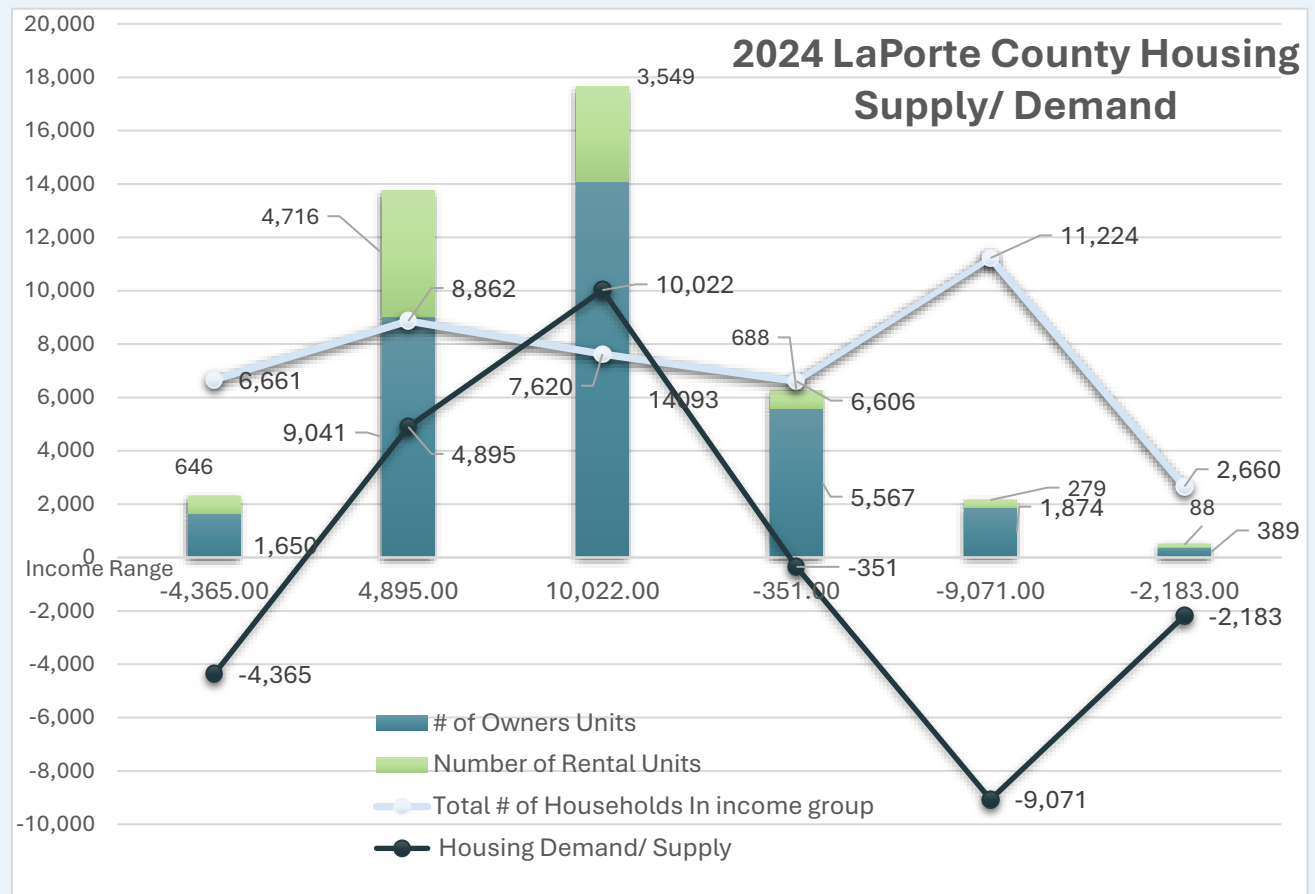


Figure 3-15

Performance Measure: Population changes in Main Centers¹

Northwest Indiana residents living in “Main Centers” (denser downtowns and community centers) have better access to nearby opportunities and can walk or take transit. Increasing residential population in Main Centers can support transit expansion, reduce environmental impacts of automobiles, support local businesses, and may boost local tax revenues. Figures 3-16, 3-17, and 3-18² show an increase in population in the main and neighborhood centers of small- to medium-sized communities such as Winfield, Lake Station, South La Porte, and Munster, while some of the larger communities lost population in their main centers.

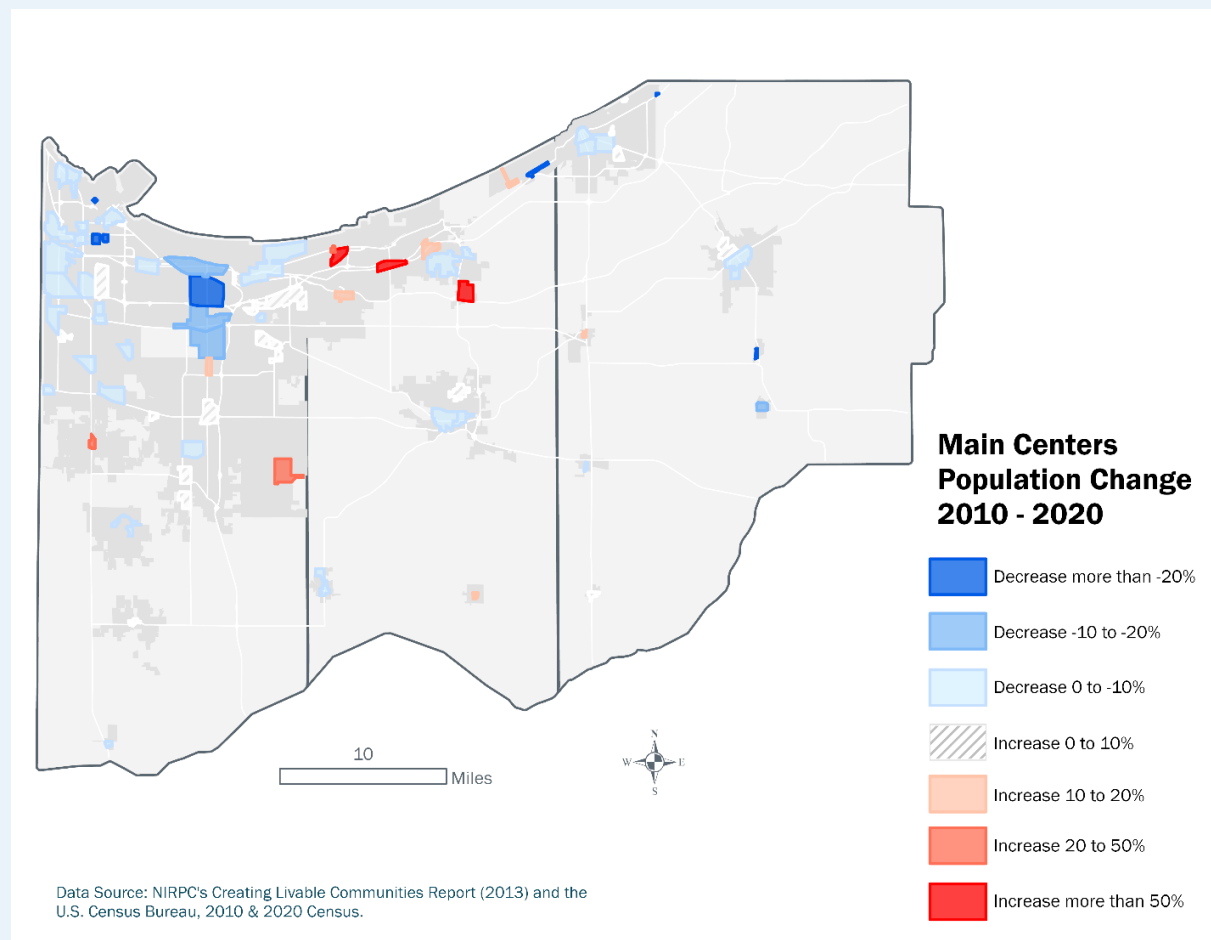


Figure 3-16

¹ Main Center areas are defined in the [Creating Livable Communities](#) report, developed by NIRPC and published in 2013.

² For consistency throughout this report, the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Data for 2014 and 2024 have been compared. ACS 5-year estimates contain detailed socioeconomic data that is no longer collected by the decennial census. However, examining geographies as small as Main Centers can introduce significant margins of error. Unlike the physical count of population assessed in the decennial census, the ACS annually samples a small portion of households throughout the country. In smaller geographies, the number of surveyed households is extremely low, creating high uncertainty. Block geographies, the smallest unit of Census geography, provide the most granular data that can be used for custom aggregations, such as the Main Centers.

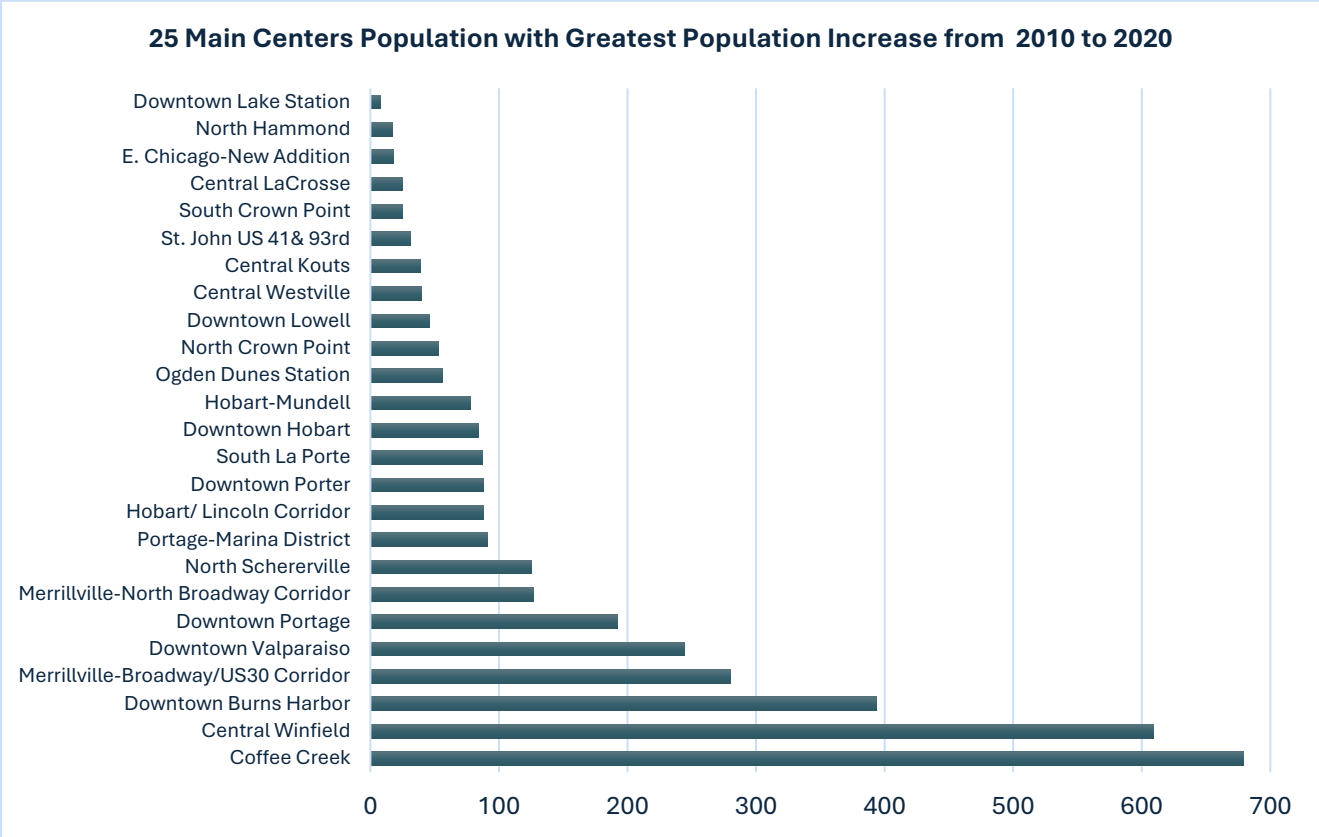


Figure 3-17

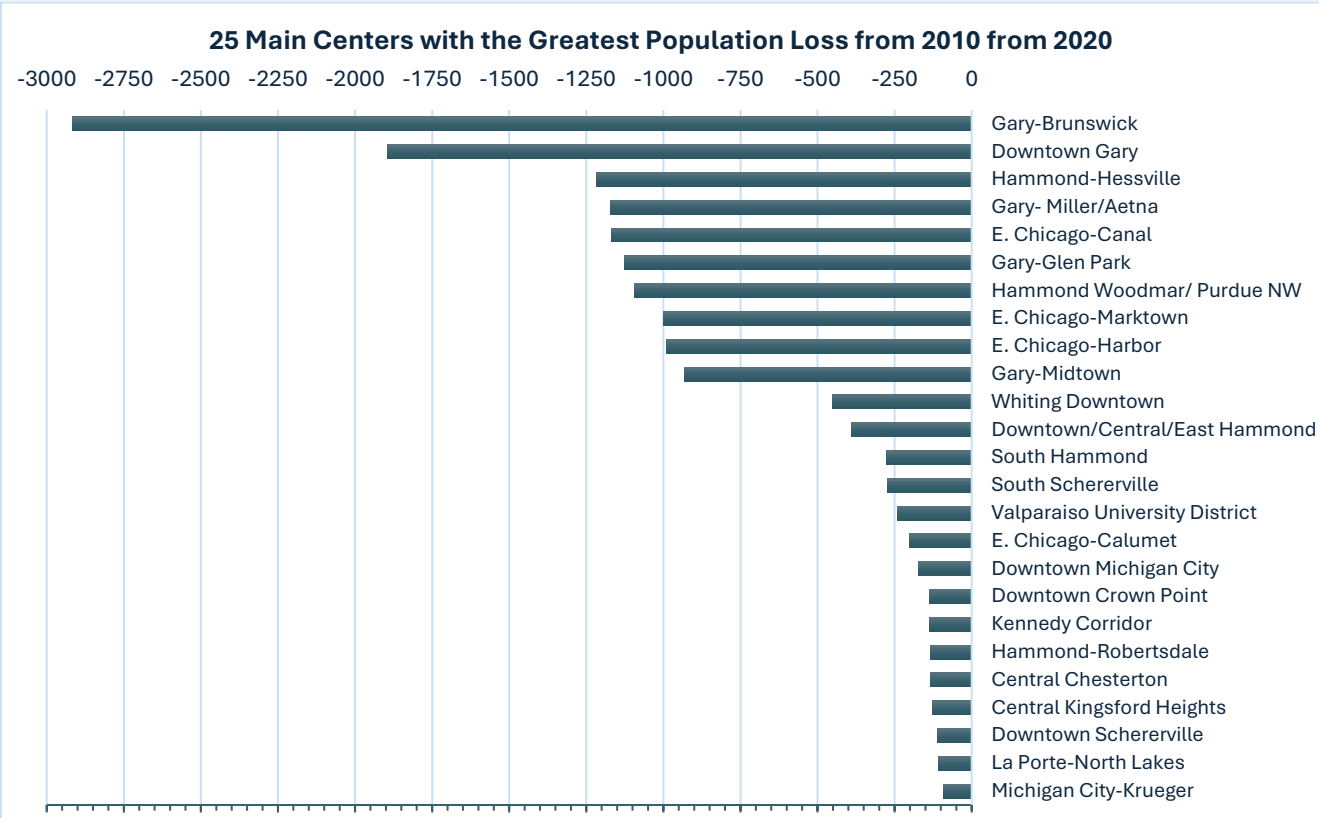


Figure 3-18

Performance Measure: Employment changes in Main Centers

Main Centers drive community economies, and more jobs in these areas will give workers easier access to workplaces and local amenities, with better transportation options and less environmental impact. As remote work has gradually boosted office employment, Main Centers are evolving into mixed-use districts, attracting more residents and businesses.

As shown in Figures 3-19 and 3-20, employment has increased significantly in South Hammond, Miller/Aetna, the Hessville neighborhood in Hammond, South La Porte, Lake Station, East Chicago, and Griffith. Conversely, downtown Valparaiso, the former Munster Steel site (now Centennial Village), and downtown Whiting have experienced notable job losses.

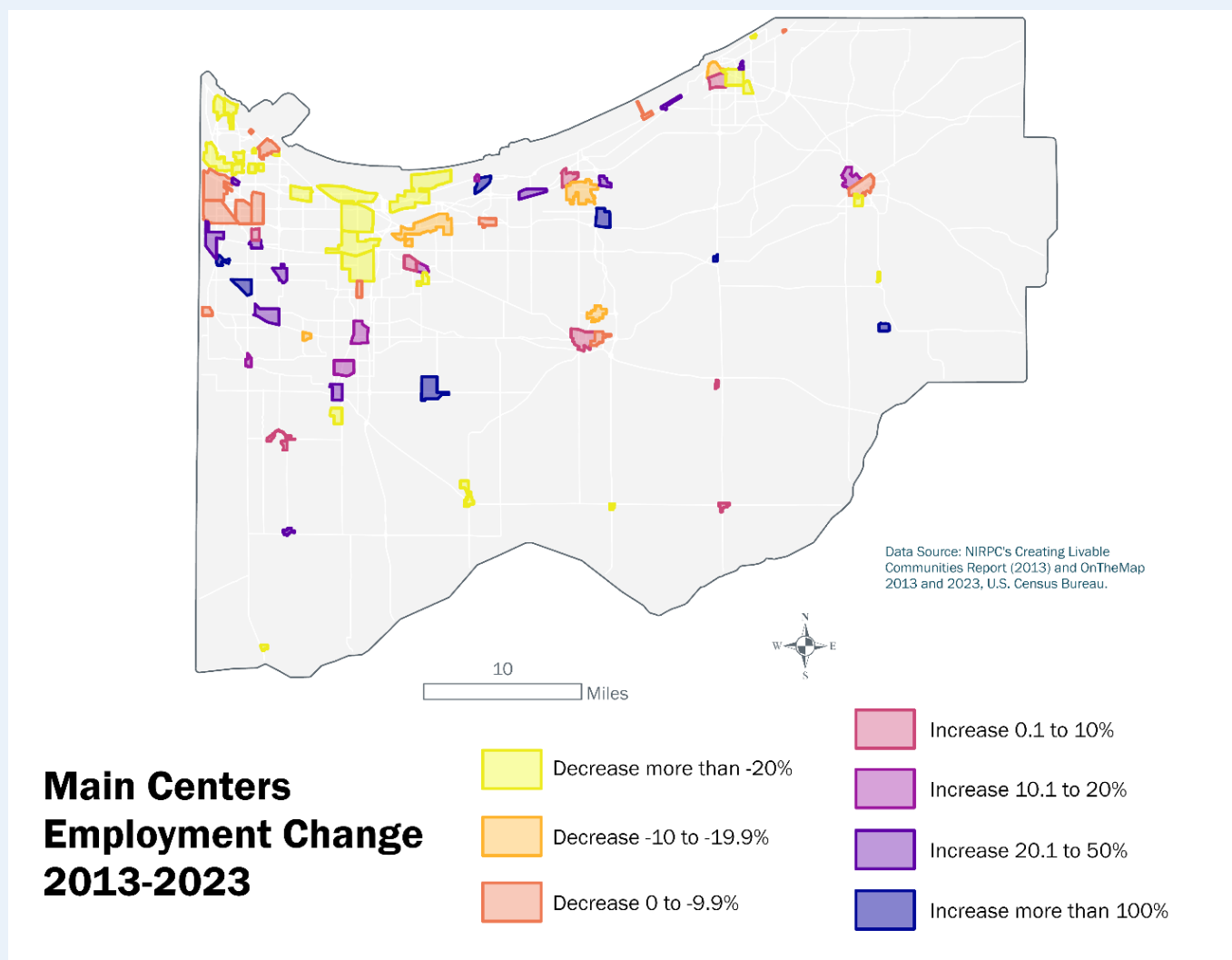


Figure 3-19

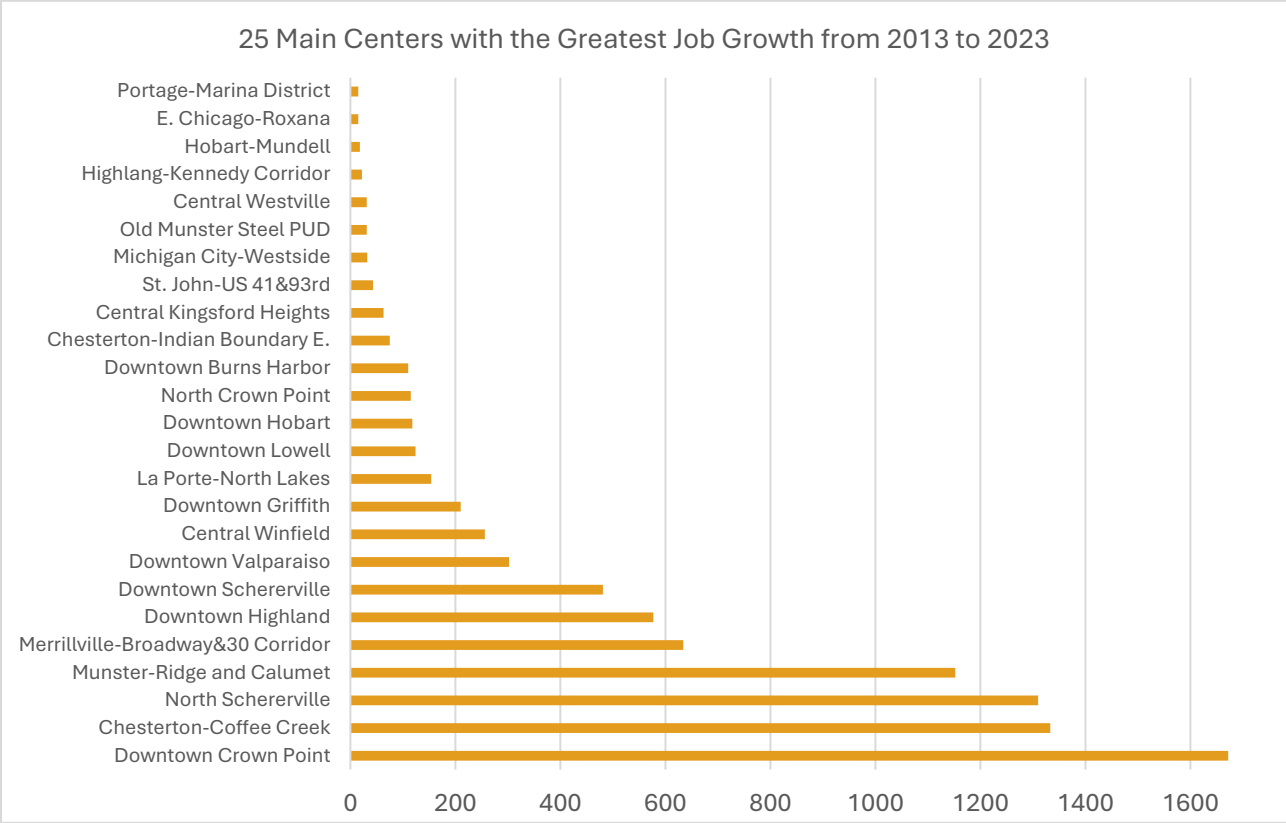


Figure 3-20

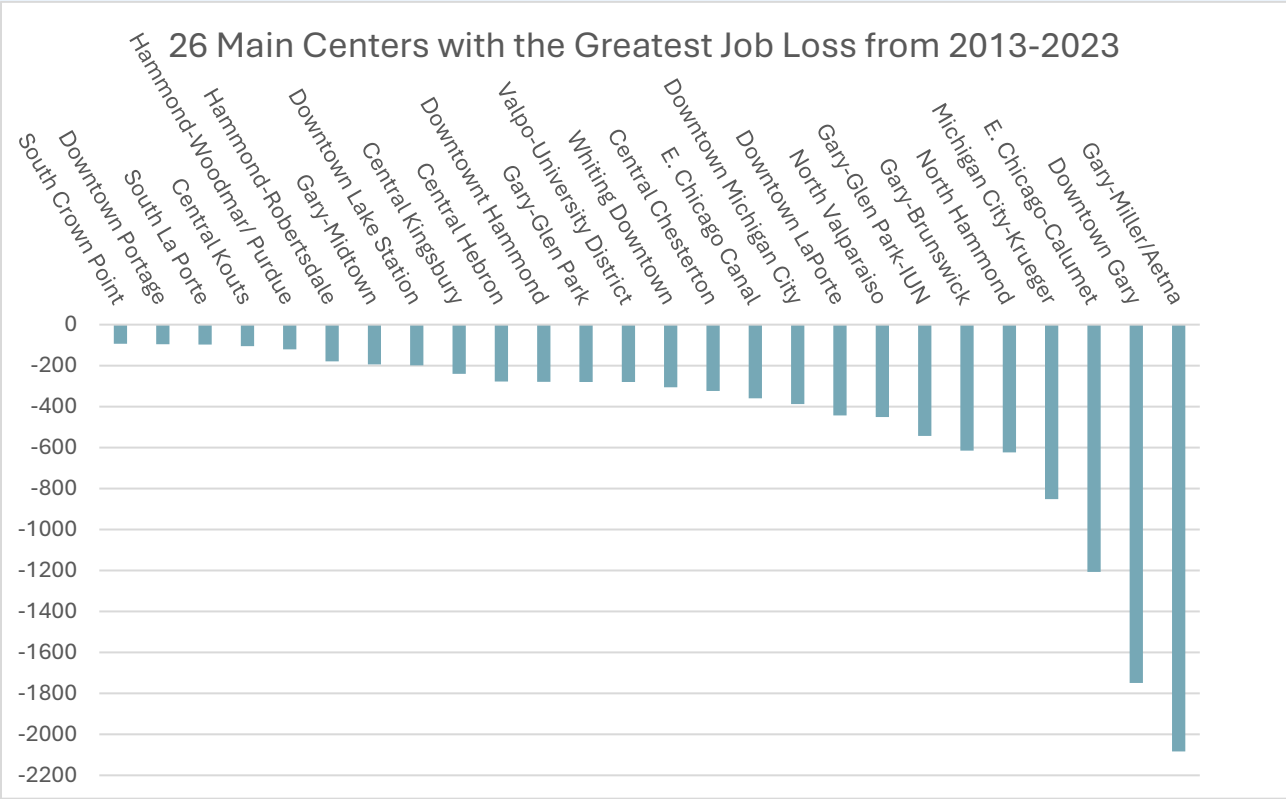


Figure 3-21

Performance Measure: Housing vacancy rate

A certain level of housing vacancy is required and expected in a healthy housing market as residents move into and out of housing units. In Northwest Indiana, industrial cities experiencing population decline, rural and seasonal vacation areas, and the main centers of older communities have the highest vacancy rates, as shown on the map (Figure 3-23).

Despite this, the region's overall vacancy rate reflects a stable

homeownership market, while elevated rental vacancy rates promote choice and

mobility. Figure 3-22 indicates that La Porte County has the highest housing vacancy

rate at 13% of the region's counties. The areas with the most vacancies are Michigan City, vacation towns, and La Porte.

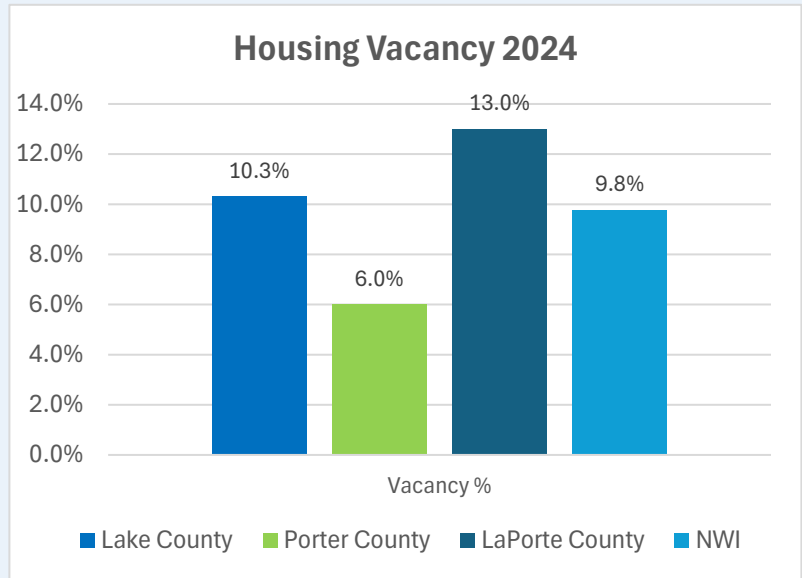


Figure 3-22

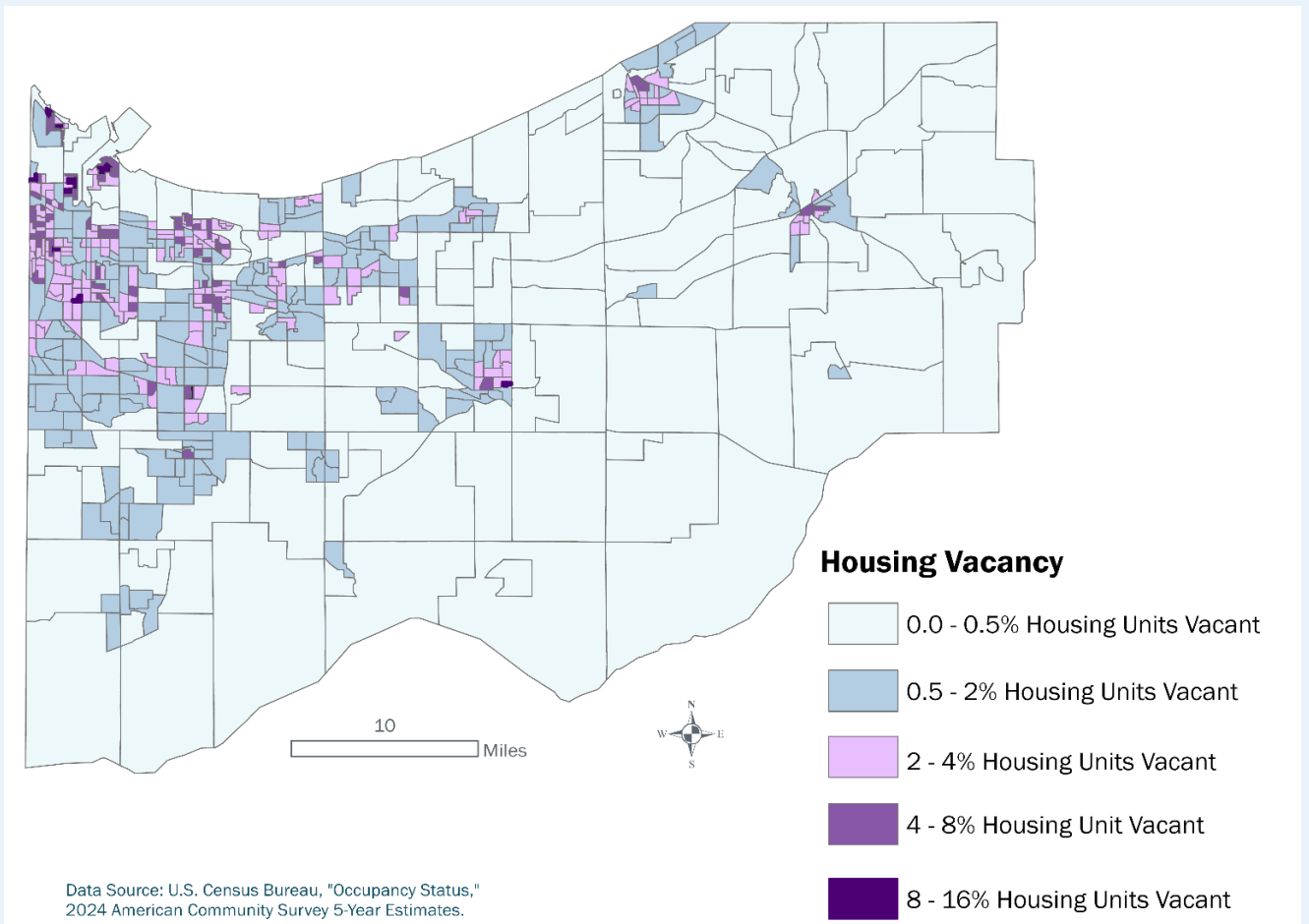


Figure 3-23

4- CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

AIR QUALITY

Improvements in Northwest Indiana's air quality since the Clean Air Act was adopted in 1963 are visible, dramatic, and well documented through decades of frequent and consistent air monitoring by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). The National Ambient Air Quality Standards have made the largest impact on the region's health, environment, and economy.

National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) pollutants are the six pollutants most regulated since the 1970s. These are generated in vast quantities throughout the economy and have direct negative impacts on people and the environment. They are ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, lead, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. For these specific pollutants, the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) must periodically review new scientific data about each and use this information to establish a threshold concentration that protects human health and the environment. These concentrations become *air quality standards*, and often separate standards are adopted for concentrations and frequencies applicable to short- and long-term exposure impacts.

Geographic areas that are designated as "attainment" have sufficient monitoring data to demonstrate that they are meeting the health-based air quality standards for one of the six NAAQS pollutants. "Nonattainment" areas have monitoring data indicating that air pollutants exceed air quality standards. An area may be in attainment for one pollutant or one frequency standard, but in nonattainment for others. In 2004, segments of the region were in nonattainment for four of the six NAAQS.

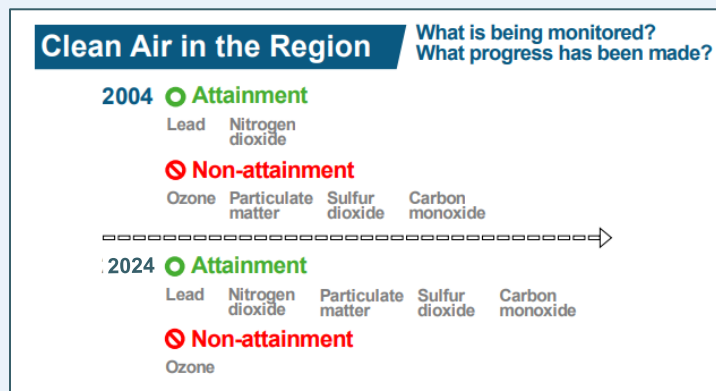


Figure 4-1: Northwest Indiana National Ambient Air Quality Standard Attainment Status

Since 2018, the only nonattainment designation in the region has been the 8-Hour Ozone standard.

Ozone is formed during a chemical reaction when volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides in the air encounter a sunny day with hot, stagnant air and clear skies. Even as regulations reduce transportation and industrial emissions of these contributing pollutants, the increased frequency of high-heat days can result in greater ozone formation.

In 2025, only 13 townships in northern Lake and Porter counties remained in nonattainment of the 8-hour Ozone Standard. Once an air quality standard is attained, the state and the region must

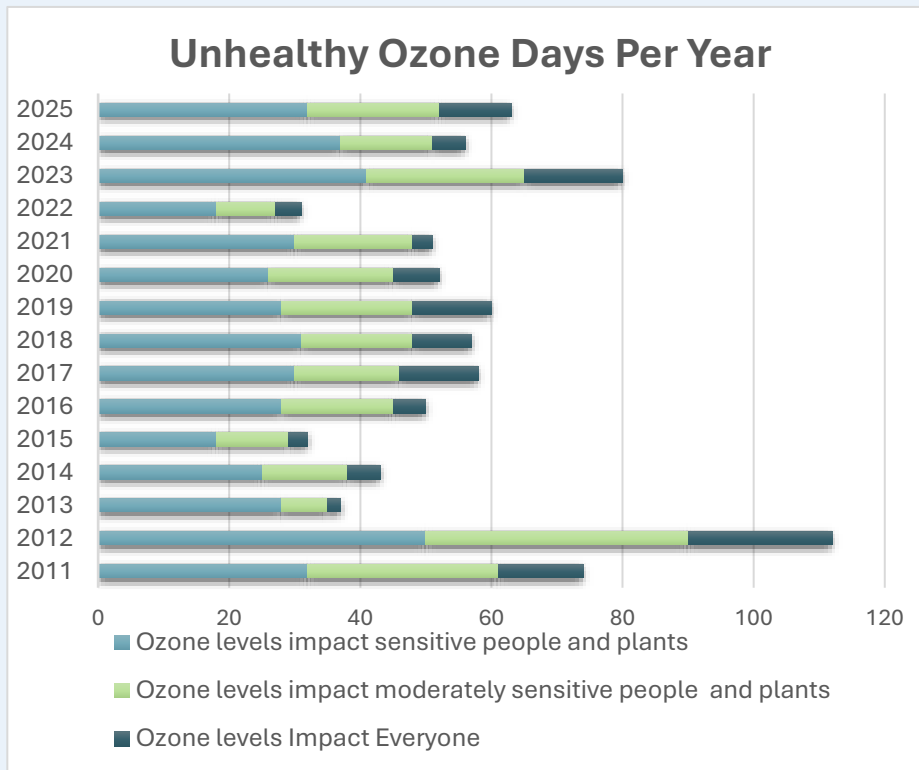


Figure 4- 2: Unhealthy Air Quality Index Days Per Year 2011-2025

demonstrate that the improvement will last by maintaining control measures and conducting ongoing monitoring.

Beyond regulatory compliance, it is important to consider how ozone air pollution impacts daily life in the region. **Error!**

Reference source not found. shows the number of days per year that ozone levels in the region were high enough to be unhealthy for the residents of Northwest Indiana.

Unhealthy levels of ozone impact plant growth.^{3,4}

Nonattainment status also adds cost in time and equipment to businesses

and industries throughout the region.

Highly Ozone Sensitive NWI Plants & Trees

Highly Sensitive:

Crops: Soybeans, beans, peas, sorghum

Trees: Black Cherry, Quaking Aspen, Sycamore, Tulip Poplar

³ Lee EH, Andersen CP, Beedlow PA, Tingey DT, Koike S, Dubois JJ, Kaylor SD, Novak K, Rice RB, Neufeld HS, Herrick JD. [Ozone exposure-response relationships parametrized for sixteen tree species with varying sensitivity in the United States.](#) Atmos Environ (1994). 2022 Sep 1;284:1-16. doi: 10.1016/j.atmosenv.2022.119191. PMID: 35775067; PMCID: PMC9237886.

⁴ Suszkiw J, [Some crops Tolerate Ozone Pollution Better Than Others, Study Finds.](#) USDA Agricultural Research Service. Dec 5, 2023.

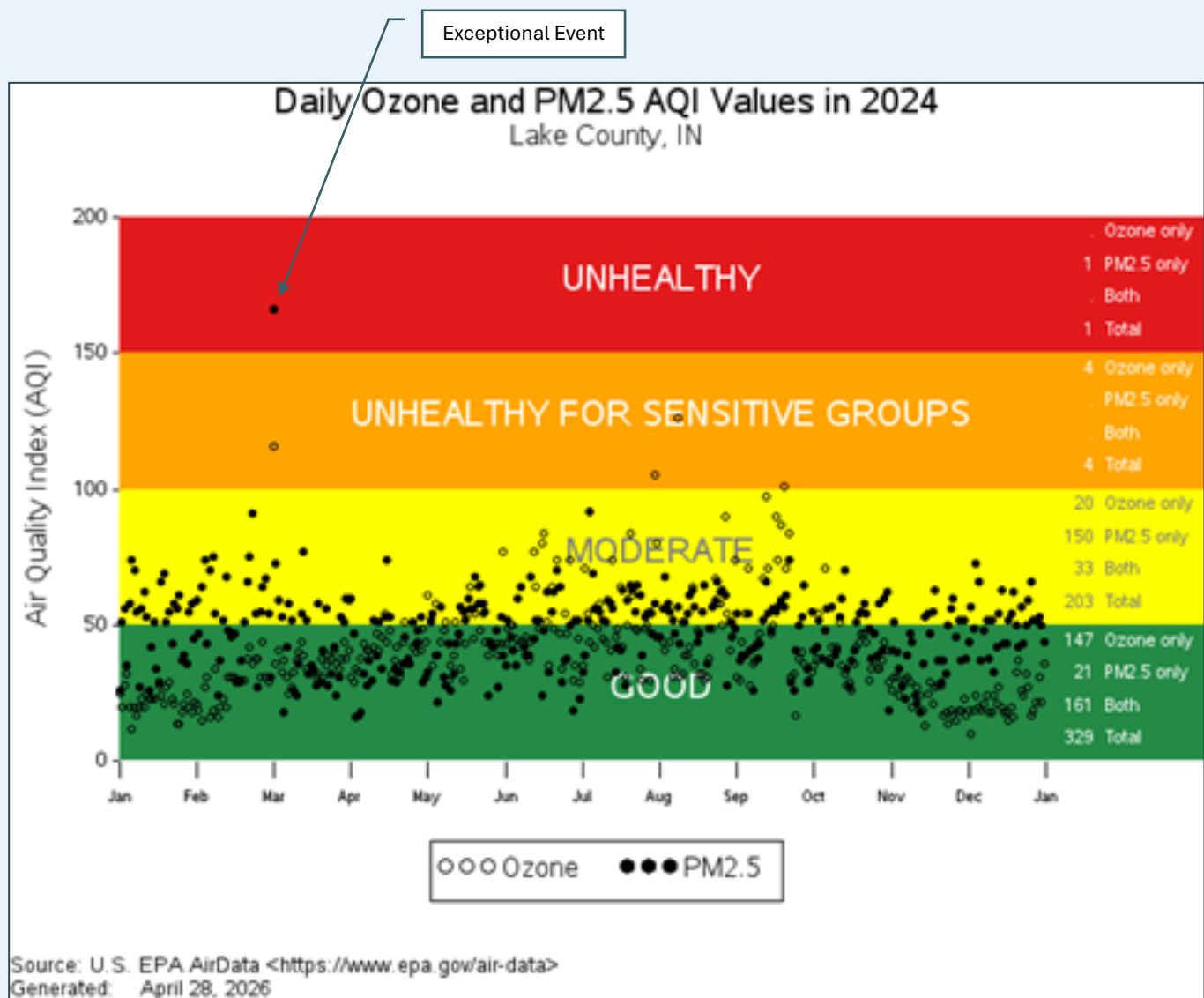


Figure 4- 3 Lake County 2024 Daily Ozone and PM2.5 Air Quality Index Values

Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) is another NAAQS pollutant that sometimes impacts health in Northwest Indiana, even though the region has attained the regulatory standard. Figure 4-3 below shows daily 2024 ozone and PM2.5 concentrations relative to the health-based Air Quality Index for each Northwest Indiana county. In recent years, large northern wildfires have caused unhealthy PM2.5 spikes, such as the one shown in Lake County on March 1st of 2024.

Biodiversity and Conservation

Northwest Indiana is known globally for its high-quality, biodiverse ecosystems in the shadow of intense industrial and urban development. It is also well known for its deep-seated, long-term commitment to ecological conservation, as embodied by the preservation of the Indiana Dunes National and State Parks. NIRPC has long partnered with federal and state natural resource agencies, local parks departments, conservation organizations, and regional land trusts to plan for and support the protection and restoration of the significant habitat resources still functioning in the region.

Since the adoption of the *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* in 2011, the amount of land protected and managed for conservation in our region has been a performance measure in long-range regional plans. For this *NWI 2050+* update, we have continued to track the acres of land owned and managed for ecological conservation and have also added lands owned by the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission (LCRBC) within the Little Calumet River Levee system. These lands are protected from development by LCRBC because of their flood-water storage value for Little Calumet River's West Branch. In 2026, combining the acreage of managed lands with the LCRBC-owned land yields 99 square miles of protected land in the region.

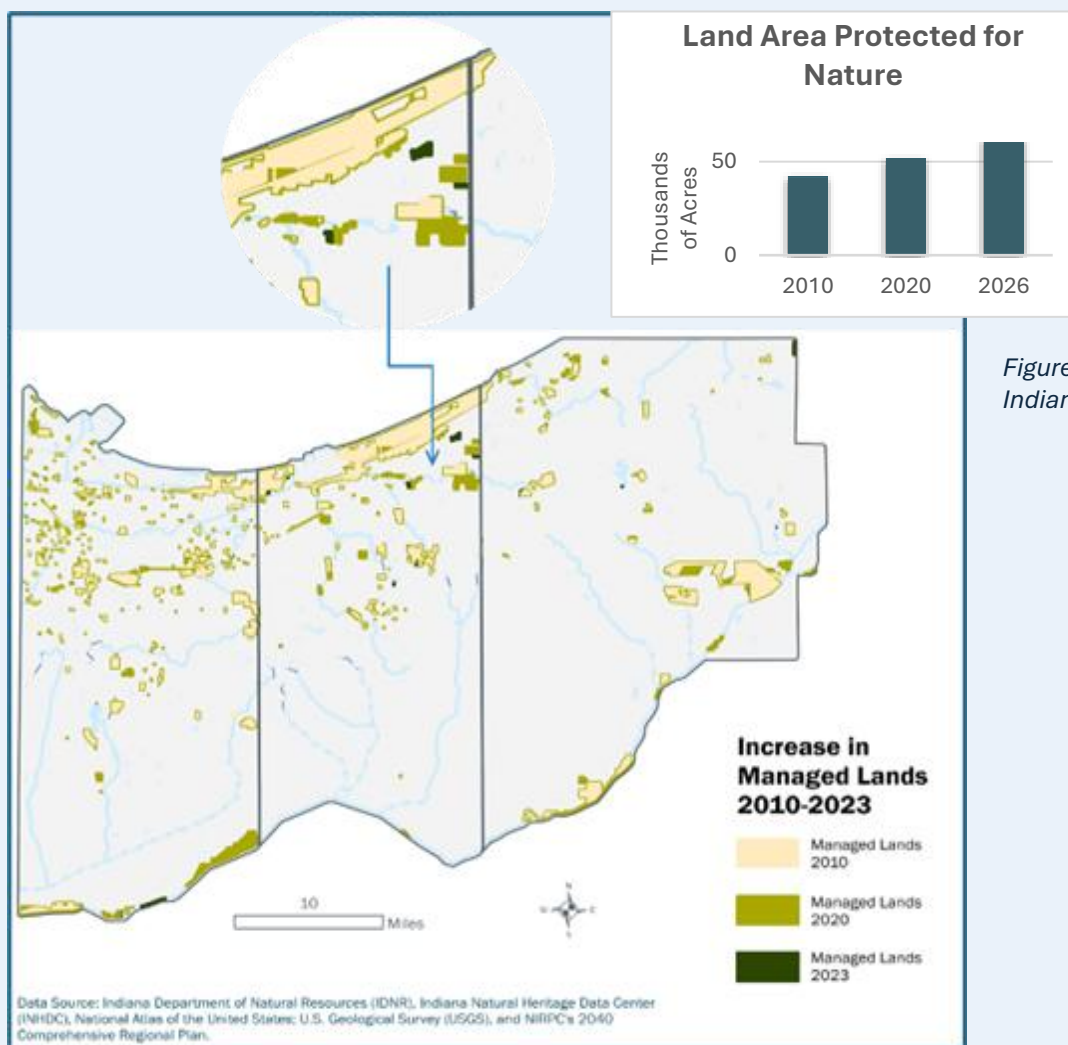


Figure 4- 4: Northwest Indiana Protected Lands

In *NWI 2050*, NIRPC adopted critical paths to a connected region. “Connect fragmented natural areas and integrate links between people and green spaces to increase resiliency and health outcomes” is one of the steps on this critical path.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources’ *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP) 2026-2030 lists the state guideline for public outdoor recreational space as 20 acres per 10,000 people. In 2009, NIRPC staff worked with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Lake Michigan Coastal Program (LMCP) to determine Level of Service (LOS) standards for Public Access within the Lake Michigan Watershed. At that time, a goal of 50 acres per 10,000 people was established for that portion of the NIRPC region. Taken together, the standards for public access to outdoor recreational space range from 0.02 to 0.05 acres per person.

NWI Acres of Publicly Accessible Outdoor Recreational Space per Person				
Geography	Local Government Owned Acres⁵	2024 Acres Per Person	SCORP Guideline 0.02	Lake Michigan Coastal Program 0.05
Lake County	11,092	0.022	✓	
Porter County	2,882	0.016		
LaPorte County	2,645	0.024	✓	
Local Govt owned	16,620	0.021	✓	
NWI Protected Land	58,379	0.074	✓	✓

This analysis does not account for where people live in relation to these recreational and natural places. The map below shows the population living within half a mile of a publicly accessible outdoor recreation space. In 2014, 456,980 people, or 60% of the region's residents, lived within half a mile of public access to nature. By 2024, that number decreased by 2,328 people, so that only 58% lived in that proximity.

⁵ *Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2026-2030*

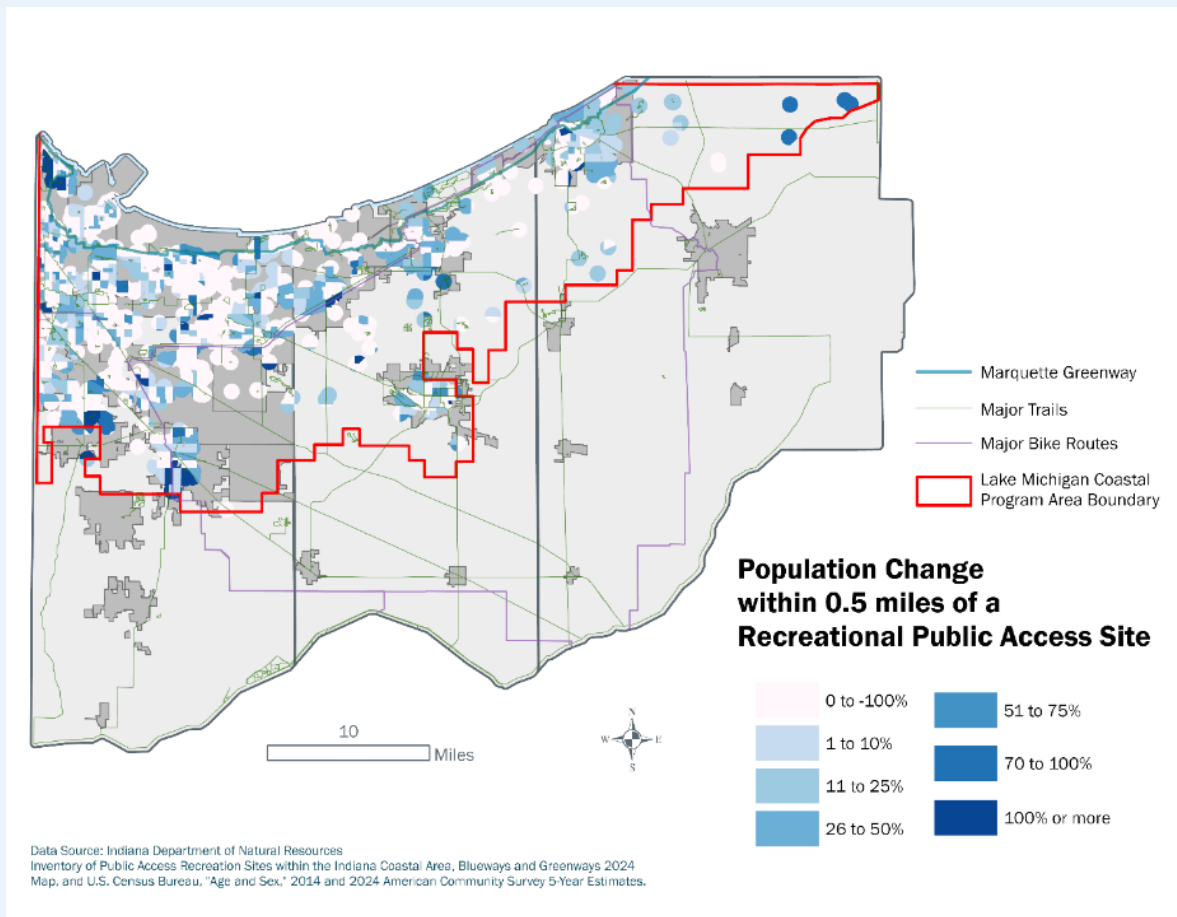


Figure 4-5. Changing Population within one half mile of natural area public access.

For the past decade, NIRPC, with financial support from Arcelor Mittal, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation, and IDNR Lake Michigan Coastal Program, has worked with conservation partners to coordinate conservation efforts across the Calumet Region. This collaboration identified ten focus areas where decades of effort have resulted in clusters of protected lands containing high biodiversity river corridors, wetlands, and forests. The partners helped to facilitate further conversation with land conservation agencies and park departments to create and align conservation action plans for these important hubs of natural quality and habitat value. The resulting consensus-based map of high-priority conservation areas was adopted by NIRPC in *NWI 2050+*.

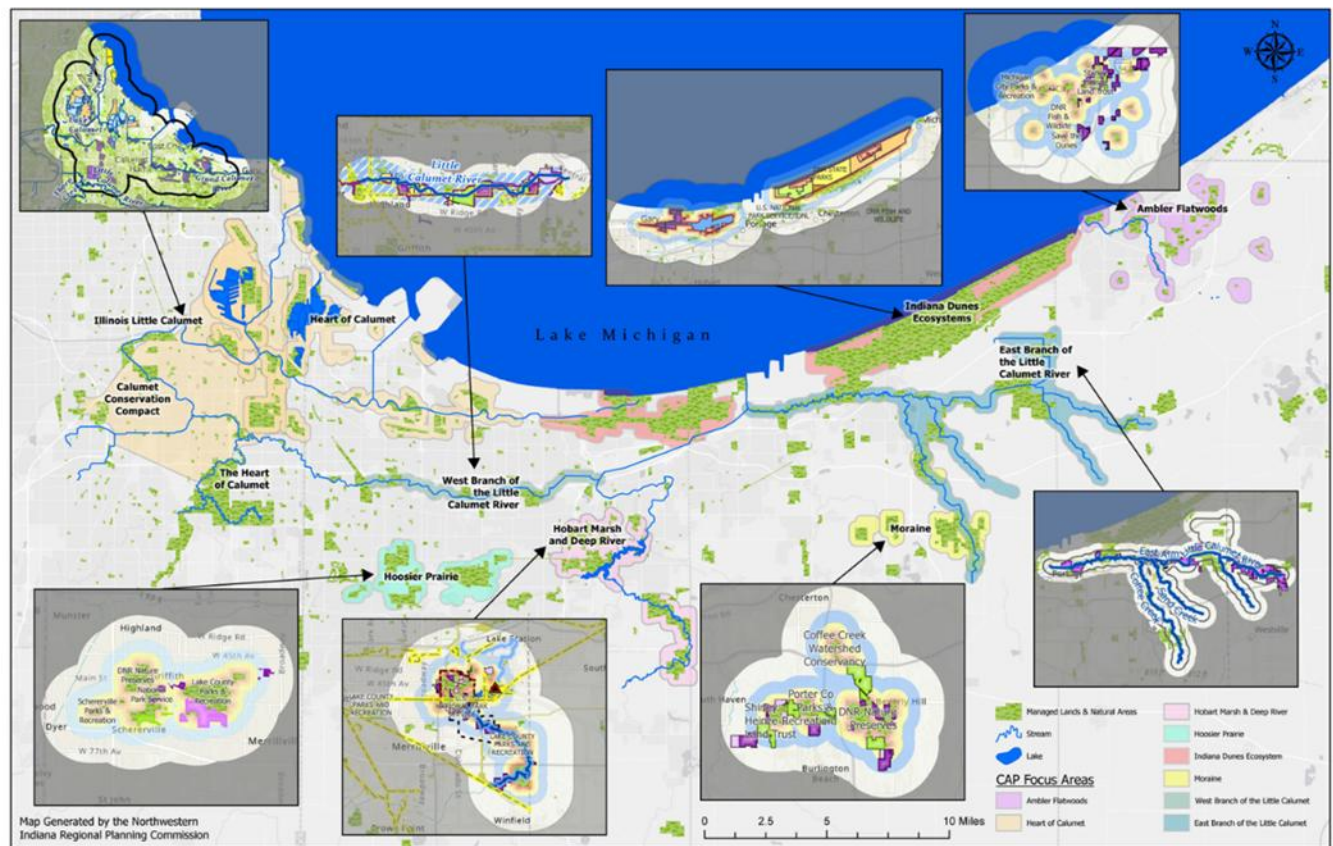


Figure 4- 3: Regional Conservation Focus Area Map

Altogether, the eight conservation focus areas studied for the conservation action planning effort identified over 36,000 acres of land in Northwest Indiana of conservation value. Slightly more than one-third of that is already in protected lands.

Focus Area Conservation Lands (acres)	Focus Area Conservation Land Protected (acres-%)
36,102	13,467 –37%

Figure 4- 7: Protected Conservation Focus Area Land

Regionwide, NIRPC further analyzed the National Land Cover Database to evaluate areas with large enough patches of contiguous natural land cover to qualify as Core (> 40 acres) or Secondary Habitat (2-40 acres). The map below shows Core and Secondary Habitat Patches in 2024, where this habitat is in Protected Lands, and where these habitat patches offer potential to improve connectivity for wildlife. Dark green and gray areas outlined in pink represent approximately 150,000 acres of unprotected land that could buffer and provide conservation connection value if maintained in conservation development, passive recreation, or other uses that allow wildlife to migrate between the Protected Lands.

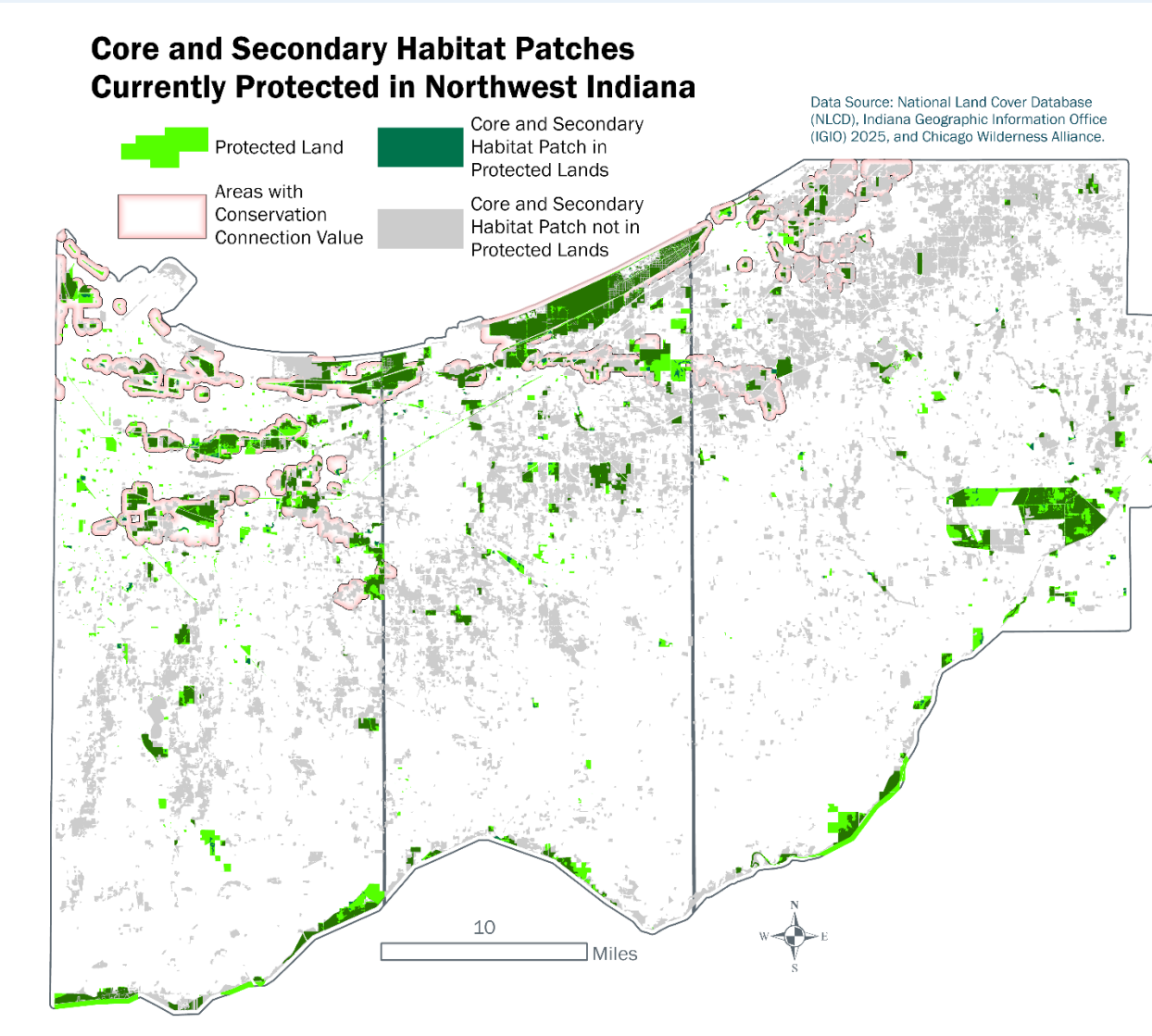


Figure 4- 8: Areas with Conservation Connection Value

Green Infrastructure and Resilience

In prior plans, NIRPC has placed significant emphasis on green infrastructure for the many valuable landscape functions and ecosystem services it can provide. These functions and services are integral to building resilience from natural hazards in our region and our communities. A review of County hazard mitigation plans showed the following common natural hazards connected to the region’s geology, geography, and climate.

Common Regional Natural Hazards Risk Levels			
	Lake County	Porter County	LaPorte County
Coastal Hazards		Elevated	
Drought	Low	Low	Elevated
Earthquake	Elevated	Elevated	Low
Extreme Temperature (Heat or Cold)	Elevated	Low	Elevated
Fire	Elevated	Low	Severe
Flood	Severe	Low	Elevated
Landslide/Subsidence	Low		Low
Storms: Hail, Thunder, Wind	Severe	Severe	Elevated
Tornado	Elevated	Low	Elevated
Winter Storm and Ice	Elevated	Severe	Severe

Figure 4- 9: County Natural Hazard Risk Evaluation

In 2018, Purdue University published the Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment. At that time, extreme precipitation events in Northwest Indiana were predicted to increase from the range of 10 to 13 per year to as many as 17 per year by 2050.

Land covered with impervious surfaces, such as rooftops and pavement, also increases the volume of stormwater runoff and the flashiness of streams. The level of imperviousness of an area also impacts the ability of adjacent waterways to support diverse aquatic life.

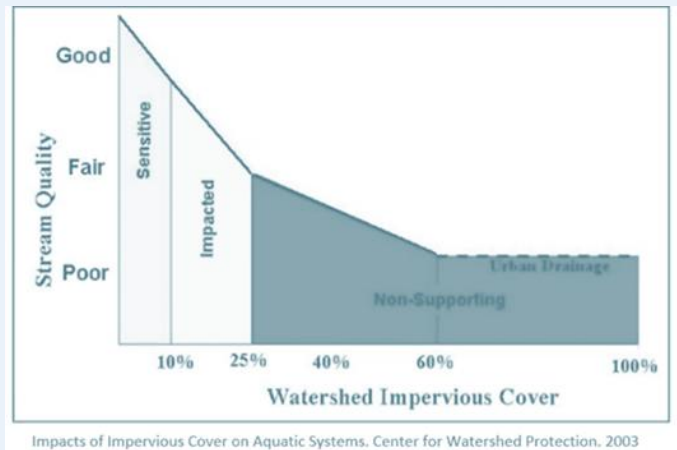
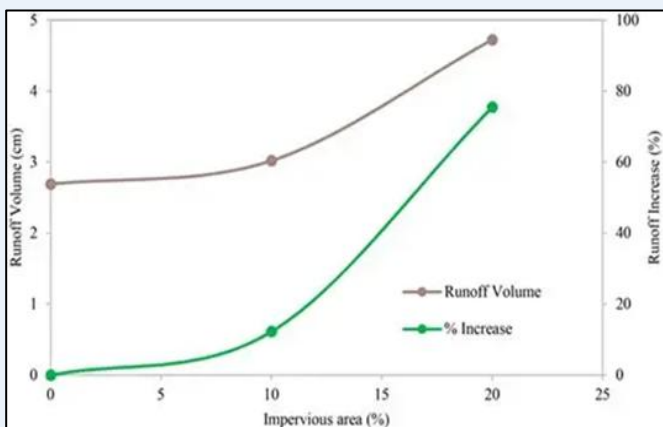


Figure 4-10: Impacts of Imperviousness on Runoff Volume and Stream Quality

The number of days with extreme heat events was forecasted to increase from what was then between 19 to 23 days to between 56 and 73 days per year by 2050. Further refinement of these forecasts is underway at Indiana University, with the planned *Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment 2.0* to be completed in 2028.

Green Infrastructure, such as urban trees, forests, protected wetlands, and floodplains, that retain stormwater runoff near its impervious source area and protect streams with riparian buffers, can help increase the resilience of communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems to these natural hazards.

In the *Greenways + Blueways 2020 Plan for Northwest Indiana*, NIRPC recommended protecting streams and waterways with riparian development setbacks, natural cover, and green infrastructure. Northwest Indiana has 1,749 miles of rivers and streams. As of 2024, 606 miles (34%) have naturalized riparian corridors. Figure 4-11 illustrates the benefits provided by naturalized riparian buffers of different widths. Figure 4-12 maps the riparian buffers and corridors protected from development in Northwest Indiana.

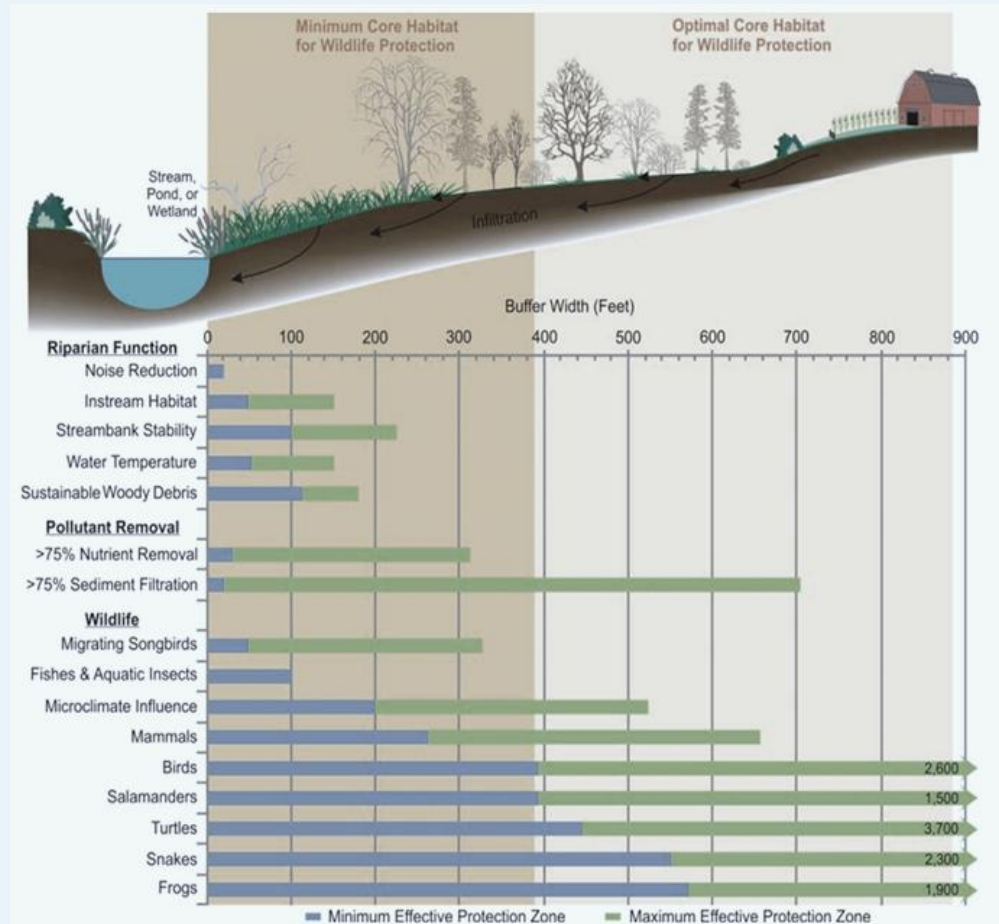


Figure 4- 11: Functions Provided by Riparian Buffers

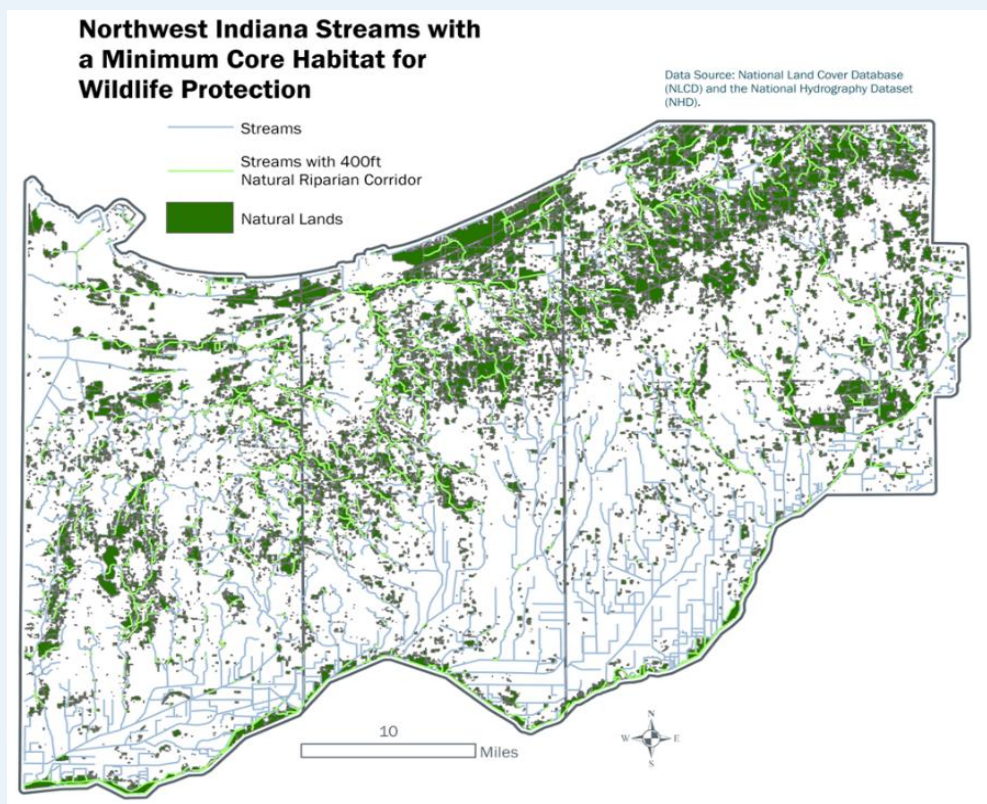


Figure 4- 12: Waterways with Naturalized Riparian Corridors

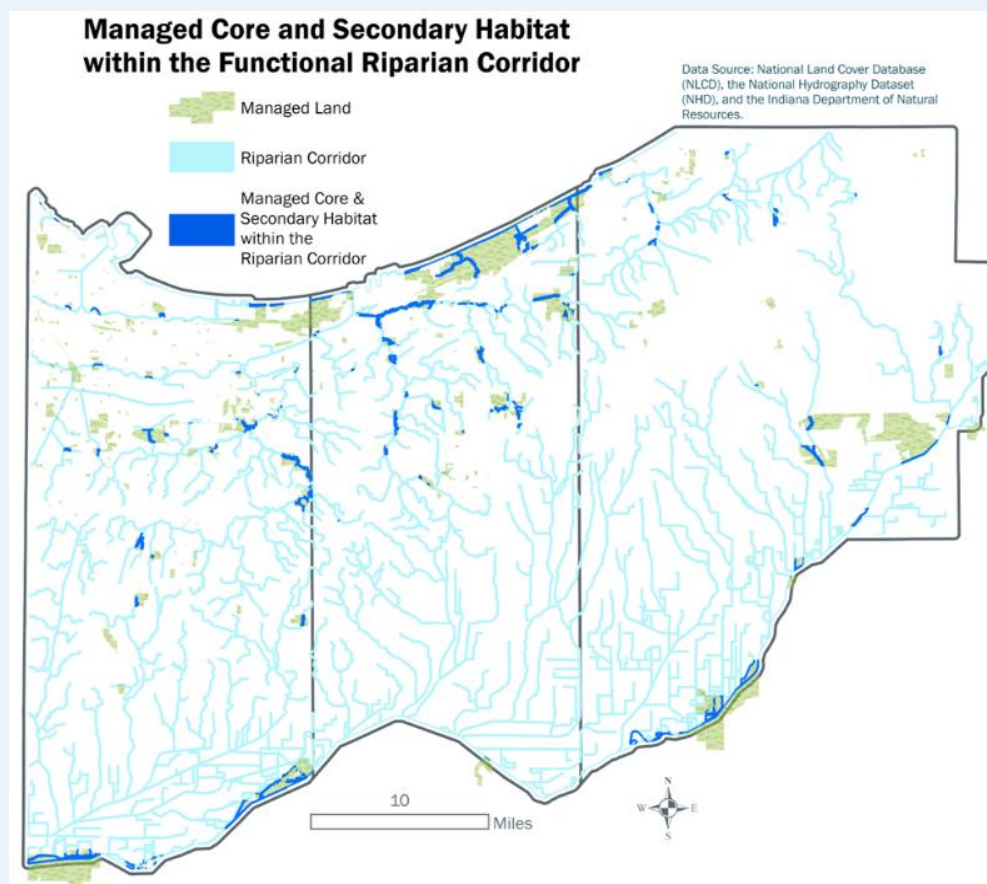


Figure 4- 13: Riparian Corridors in Protected Lands

Urban Tree Canopy is a valuable green infrastructure factor that improves resilience to several natural hazards in addition to other environmental and quality of life factors. Urban forest systems impact rainfall and stormwater in many ways. Trees themselves retain water in their trunks and branches. Leaf canopies decrease the speed and force of rain hitting the soil. Root networks increase the percolation rate of water into the ground. These functions improve water quality and increase resilience to urban flooding.

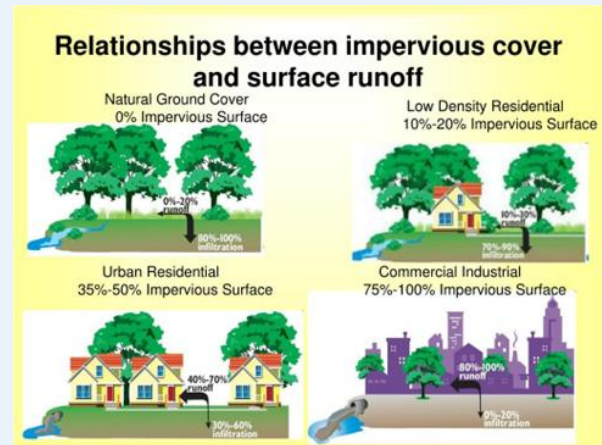


Figure 4-14: Illustration of Impervious Surface, Green Infrastructure, and Stormwater Runoff

The shade provided by trees also increases resilience to extreme heat events and to the associated home-cooling energy demand and expense. Trees even trap fine particulate matter and fugitive dust on leaf surfaces, protecting air quality. Figure 4-15 demonstrates the relationship between tree canopy and ground-level temperatures.

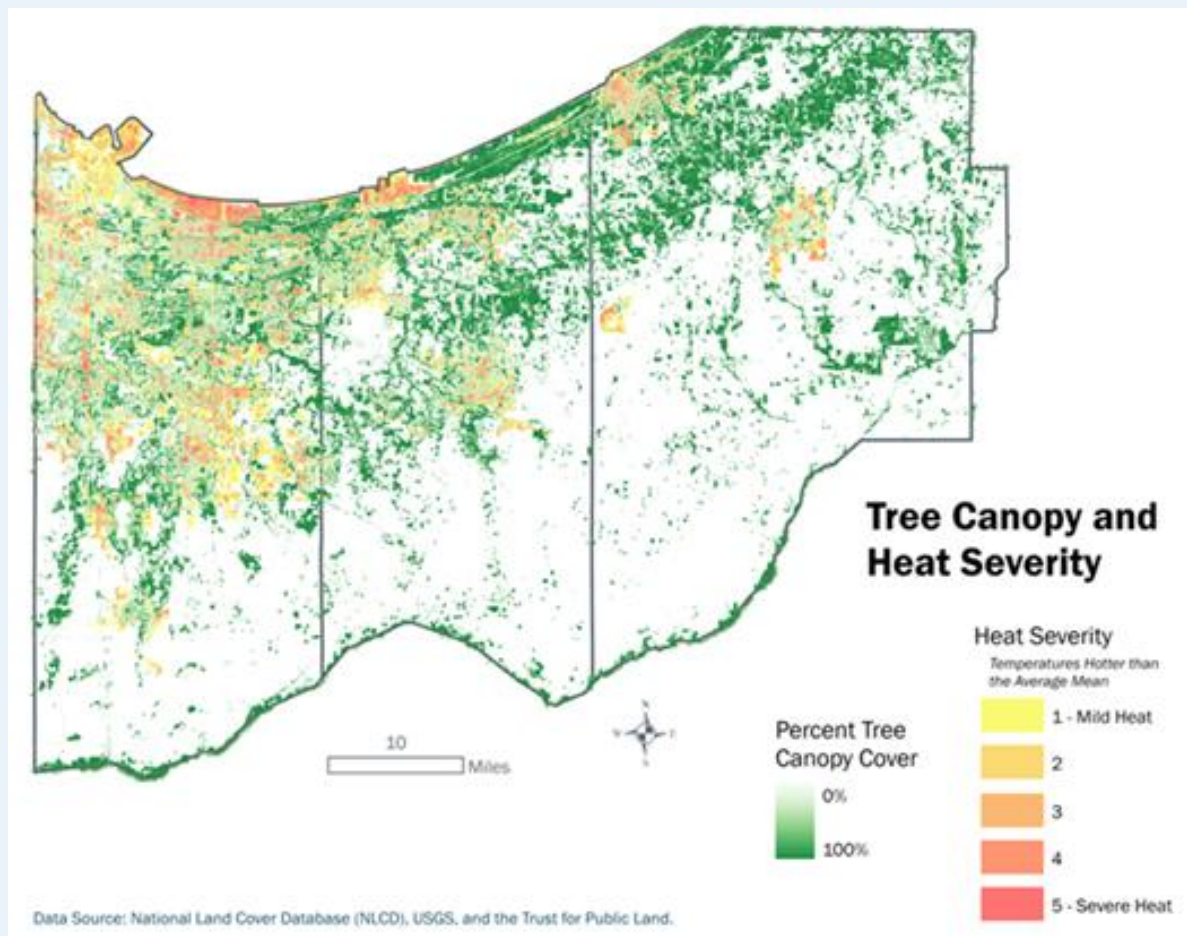


Figure 4-15: Tree Canopy and Heat Severity

The nonprofit conservation organization American Forests developed the Tree Equity Score tool to assist communities in prioritizing where trees are needed most to enhance their resiliency. The score is calculated from an overall baseline tree-canopy target, adjusted for building density, the amount of canopy already present, and a prioritization factor. The prioritization factor assigns equal weight to community age distribution, employment rates, health burden rates, heat severity, and other demographics. The resulting index helps to evaluate community tree needs. NIRPC recommends that region communities strive for a minimum Tree Equity score of 70.

County	Lake	Porter	LaPorte	Total
Tree canopy cover	29%	36%	34%	33%
# of block groups with Tree Equity Score <70	60	7	21	88
Total # of block groups	393	92	65	550
% of block groups with Tree Equity Score <70	15%	8%	32%	18%
Trees needed to bring all block groups' tree equity scores >70 (with maintaining existing)	168,983	10,780	318,934	498,697

Figure 4-16: NWI Tree Canopy Cover, Tree Equity Scores, and Tree Needs

18% of Northwest Indiana census block groups have a score less than 70, and approximately 500,000 new trees would need to be planted to bring the entire region to this target. NIRPC is making progress

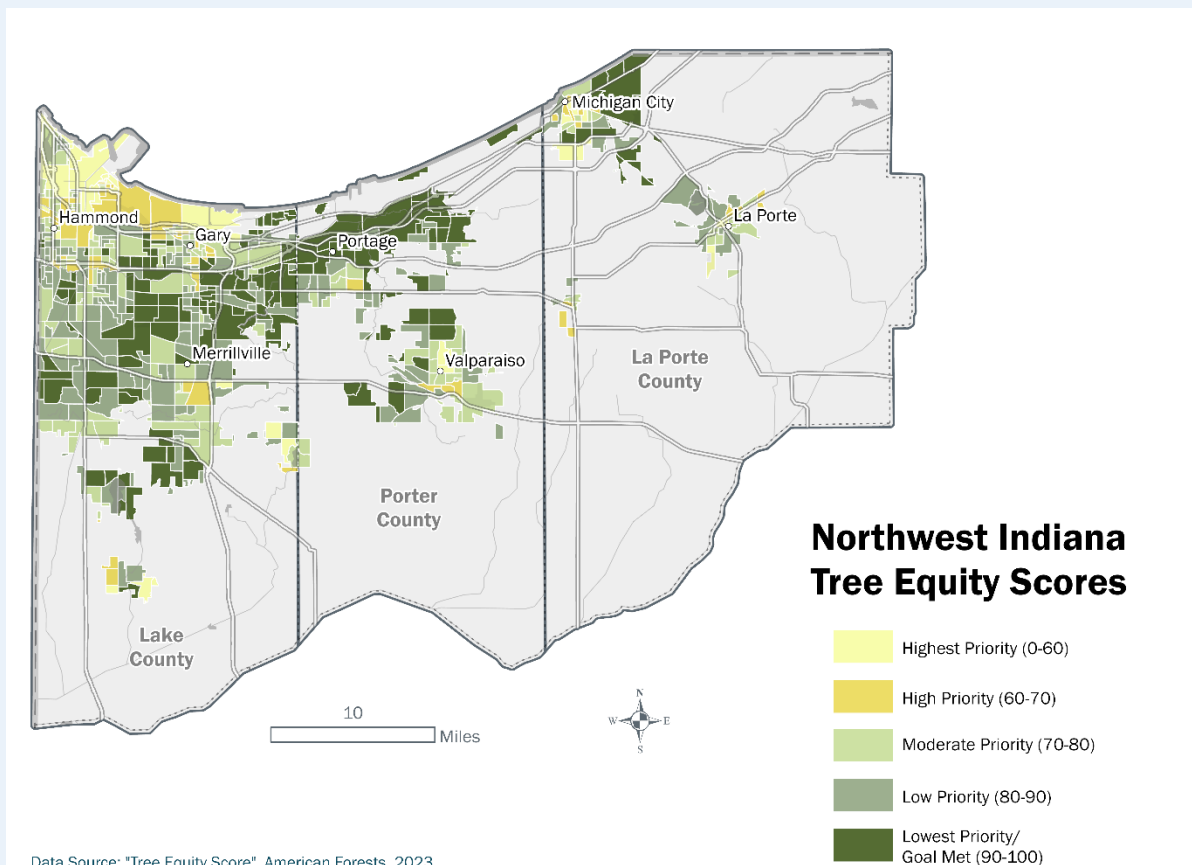


Figure 4-17: Northwest Indiana Tree Equity Score Map

toward this goal through participation in the multi-partner Communitree Program funded by the US Forest Service under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which has planted approximately 15,000 trees since 2017.

Between 2014 and 2024, Northwest Indiana tree canopy increased by 3.4% (Figure 4-18). The increase (7.1%) is greatest in Lake County, showing progress toward increasing tree canopy cover in the lowest canopy area.

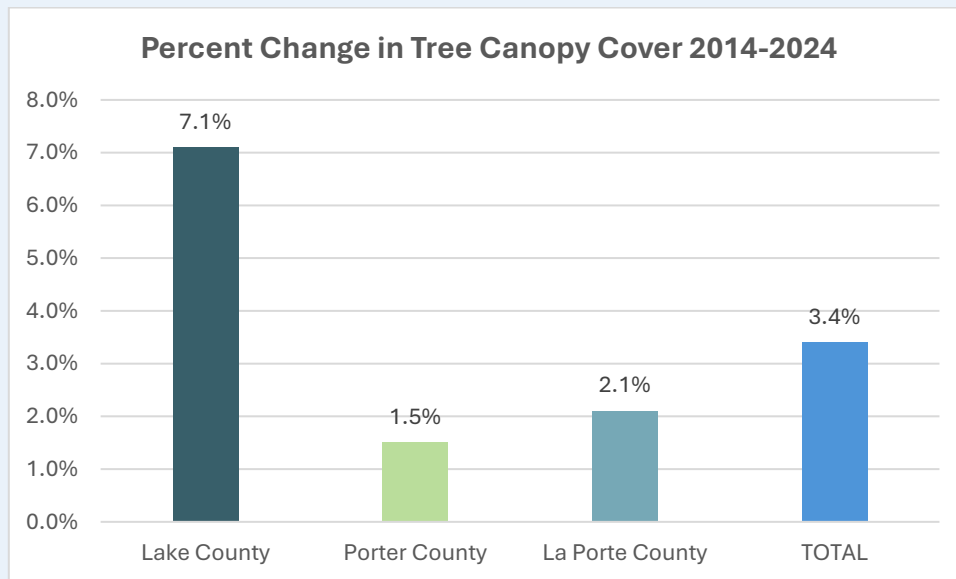


Figure 4-18: Percent change in tree canopy cover

Brownfields and Clean-up Sites

As a region built on 20th century industry and still home to some of the world’s largest integrated steel mills and one of the largest US oil refineries, it is not surprising that Northwest Indiana has many brownfields and clean-up sites. Chemical and waste handling in active industrial facilities, fueling stations, and other businesses is controlled and regulated by federal and state agencies and statutes that have expanded since the 1970s.

The result is known contaminated sites identified through a variety of different regulatory and clean-up programs like Superfund sites, State Clean-Up Program sites, Leaking Underground Storage Tank sites, Voluntary Remediation Program Sites, and others with different requirements in various stages of investigation, clean-up, and re-use. There are also identified Brownfield Program sites that have received some type of attention, investigation, or cleanup through Brownfield Program-funded grants. Some of these sites have been assessed or cleaned up through multiple programs. All together these are shown in the Brownfield and Clean-Up Sites Map below. There may be brownfields that have not been identified or investigated yet.

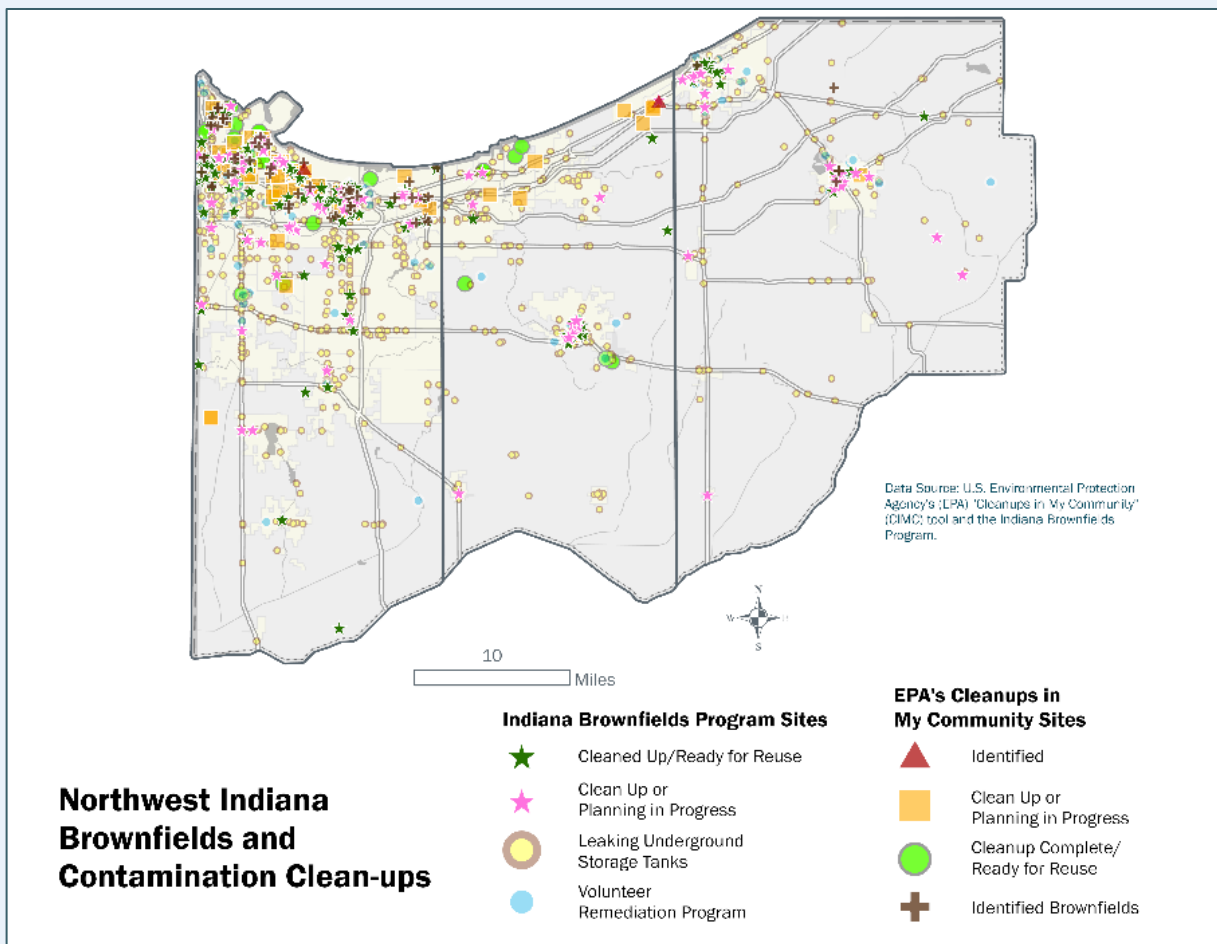


Figure 4-19: Known Brownfield and Clean-up Sites in Northwest Indiana.

Indiana Code 13-11-2-19.3 defines brownfields as “a parcel of real estate that is abandoned or inactive; or may not be operated at its appropriate use; and on which expansion, redevelopment, or reuse is complicated because of the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, a contaminant, petroleum, or a petroleum product that poses a risk to human health and the environment”. Visibly blighted sites, underutilized properties, and vacant buildings are all brownfields that will not appear on the map. Vacant land near to any of the known contaminated sites could also be a brownfield. For this reason, it is difficult to pull together a clear picture of overall progress.

Many sites that have been contaminated in the past subsequently required clean-up and risk reduction measures that protect people for the current planned use. An institutional control is typically an environmentally restrictive covenant that is placed on the property deed. These may apply to an entire site or only a portion of it. These may restrict certain land use on the property or the use of the soil or groundwater beneath it. They may require notification to IDEM prior to certain activities or require maintenance or operation of in-place caps or other control systems. Figure 4-20 lists the different institutional controls in place at Northwest Indiana cleanup sites or communities.

Environmental Restrictive Covenant, Ordinance, or Deed Notice Types	
Land Use Restrictions	
Residential Use Restriction	
Activity Restrictions	
Groundwater Use	Agriculture or Food Crop
Soil Handling and Disposal	Restricted Excavation Area
Prohibit Monitoring Interference	
Engineering Controls	
	Vapor Mitigation Contingency
Landfill Gas Collection System	Leachate Collection System
Maintain Soil or Vegetated Cap	Soil Restoration
Maintain Building Slab	Groundwater Recovery/Treatment System
Control System Operation, Monitoring, and Maintenance	Sheet Piling Wall or Slurry Wall
Maintain Vapor Mitigation System	Maintain Paved or Concrete Cap
Notice or Reporting Requirement	
Excavation Notice Required	Periodic Reporting Required
Right of Way Notification	
Environmental Restrictive Ordinances	
Prohibit use of Groundwater for drinking water: Gary, Hammond, East Chicago	

Figure 4-20: Types of Institutional Controls on NWI Cleaned Up Brownfields

Properties with Institutional Controls 2025

Data Source: Indiana Department of Environmental Management, 2025.

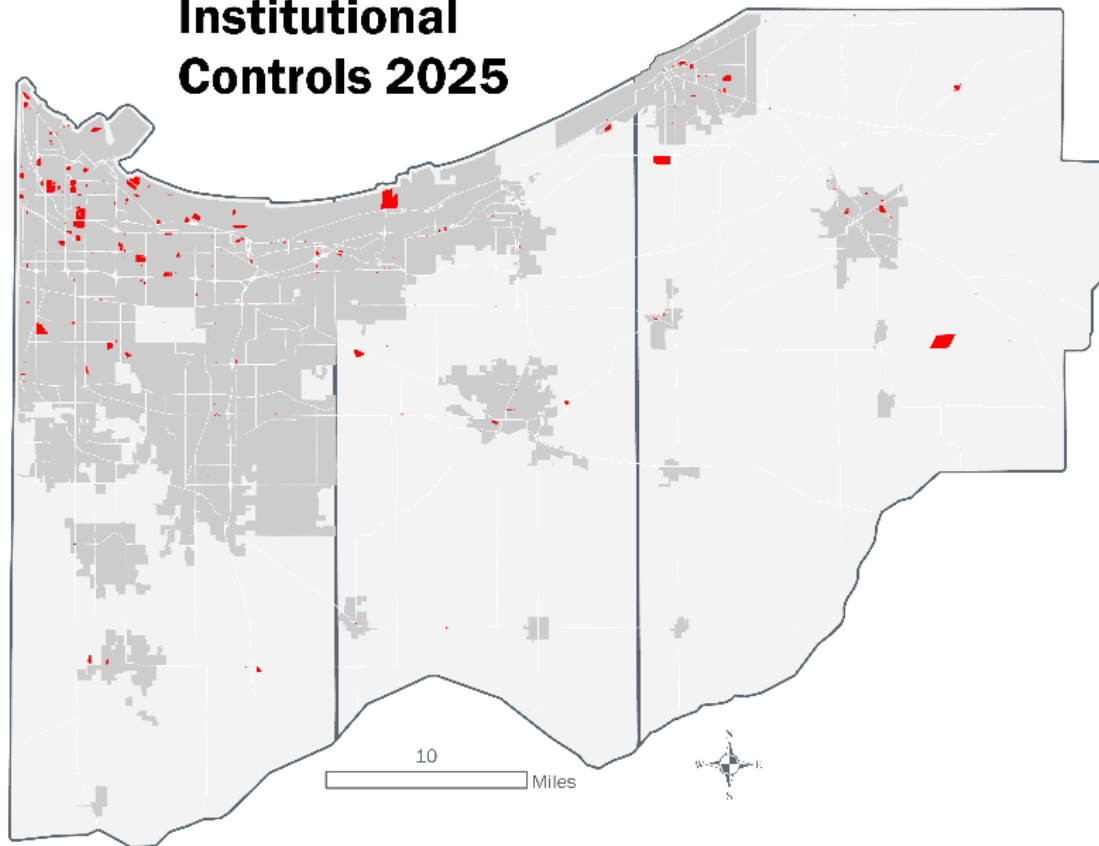


Figure 4-21: Northwest Indiana Cleaned Up Brownfields with Environmental Requirements

There are 816 brownfield or environmental program sites, covering approximately 4,600 acres in Northwest Indiana that have been cleaned up but have one or more of the environmental use restrictions or requirements recorded on deeds since 1984. The four most common are agricultural use restrictions, residential use restrictions, groundwater use restrictions, and excavation or soil management requirements.

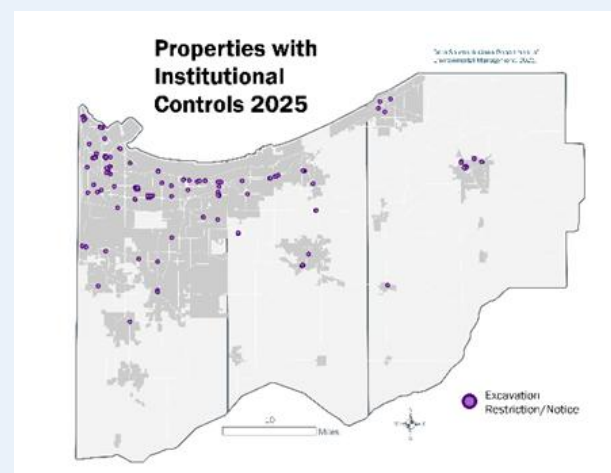
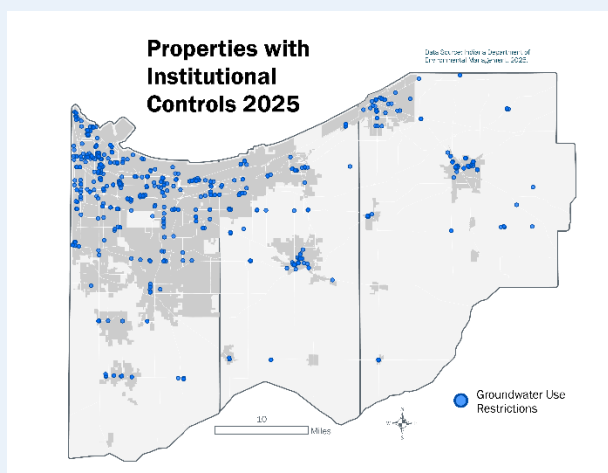
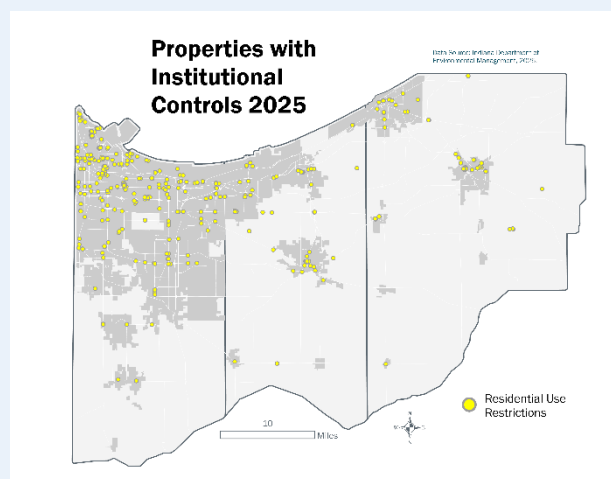
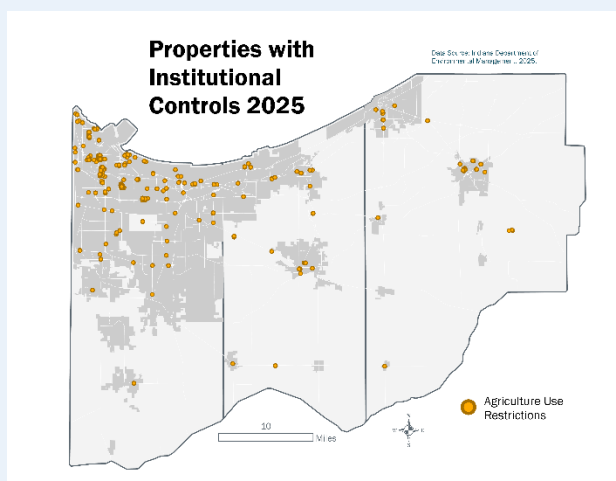


Figure 4-22: Distribution of Top 4 Brownfield Use Restrictions

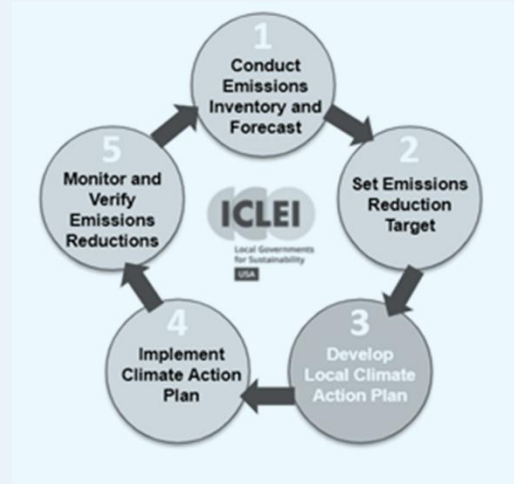
Institutional Control Type	Sites 1984-2026	%
Agricultural Use Restrictions	386	47%
Residential Use Restrictions	567	69%
Groundwater Use Restrictions	738	90%
Post Clean-up Engineering Controls	24	3%
Post-Closure Care Requirements	8	1%
Maintain Soil or Vegetative Cap	41	5%
Maintain Paved or Concrete Cap	113	14%
Excavation Restriction, Soil Management, Notice Requirements	213	26 %
Vapor Mitigation Contingency	56	7%

Figure 4-23: Number of Cleaned Up Brownfields with Deed Restrictions

Climate Action Planning

Climate action planning can include both planning to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and planning to increase resilience to the potential impacts of a changing climate. To date NIRPC climate planning efforts have focused on greenhouse gas reduction. Greenhouse gases are compounds that have been proven to have an insulating effect on the atmosphere. The most common GHGs include carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O). Because the different gases have different insulating factors, they are typically normalized into a metric called Carbon Dioxide Equivalents (CO₂e). All of the information and discussion below is presented in CO₂e as represented by all three of the primary pollutants.

Climate action planning is a continuous process of inventory, target setting, planning, implementation, monitoring action, updating emissions data, then conducting a second inventory. NIRPC, with the support of local governments, IU Environmental Resilience Institute, and Earth Charter Indiana, completed a regional 2017 baseline GHG Inventory. The total GHG emissions from Northwest Indiana were calculated to be 55 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (MMT CO₂e). In 2022 we set emission reduction targets, drafted a “business as usual forecast”, and drafted a climate action plan which was then incorporated and adopted into *NWI 2050+* In July of 2023.



Meanwhile, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act authorized EPA to issue Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grants. These were offered to states and metropolitan statistical areas on a non-competitive basis. As part of the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area, NIRPC participated as a full partner with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus of Chicago to produce a *Priority Climate Action Plan* and a *Comprehensive Climate Action Plan for Greater Chicago* (CCAPGC). This effort ultimately included 13 counties, including Lake, Porter, and LaPorte. Although the methodologies are not identical, the additional technical resources available with the federal funds allowed for a more robust analysis of the efficacy of different emission reduction strategies.

The CCAPGC used two GHG inventories. The USEPA Climate Pollution Reduction Planning Grants established emission reduction targets from 2005 baseline levels. A 2020 GHG emission inventory -the most recent year with complete data- was used to identify relative contribution of different sectors and as a baseline from which to measure future reductions.

The 2020 GHG Inventory for the entire 13-county Greater Chicago region revealed a total of 152 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. (MMT CO₂e)

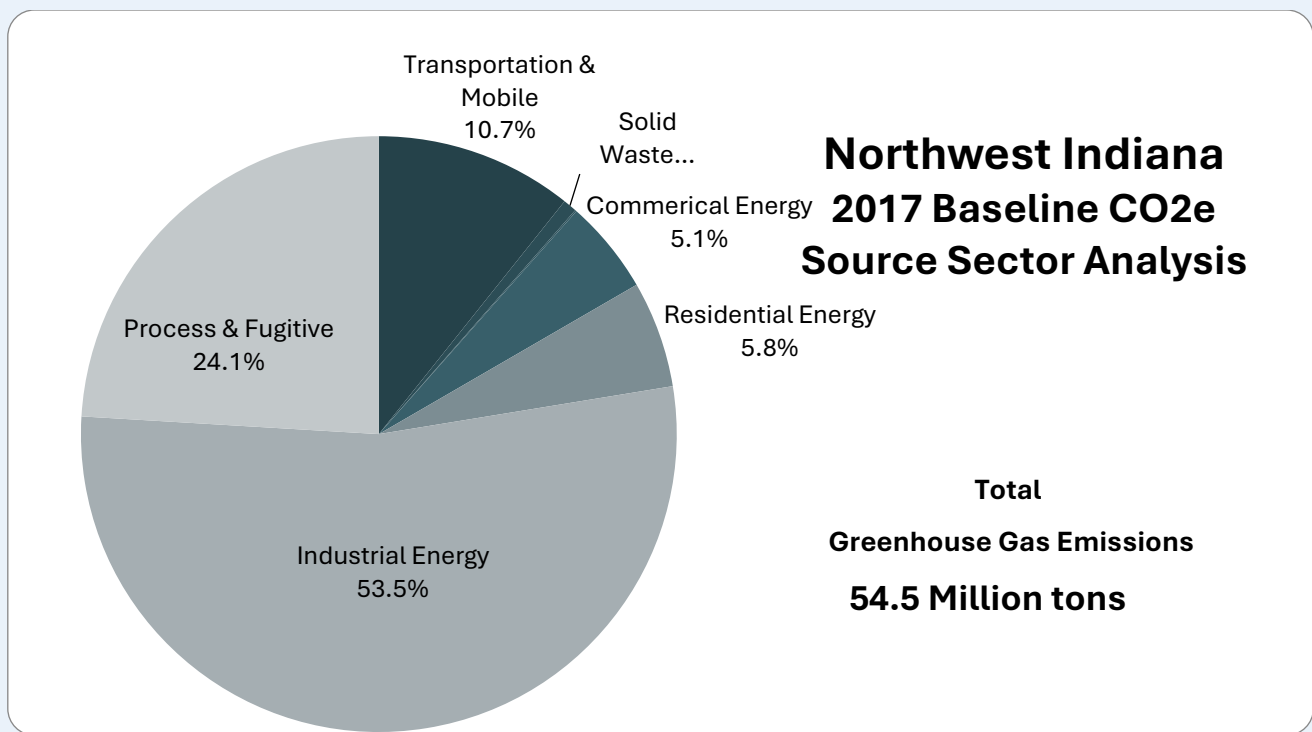


Figure 4-24: Northwest Indiana 2017 Greenhouse Gas Baseline Emission Inventory by Sector

The total CO₂e emissions from the region across sectors in 2017 were 54.5 million metric tons (MMT), approximately 71 tons per person. Northwest Indiana GHG emissions are clearly heavily influenced by the high energy demand of the region's heavy industries. Globally, industries like cement, petroleum refining, and integrated steel are recognized as major greenhouse gas contributors.

2017 Per Capita Greenhouse Gas Emission Comparisons			
US	Indiana	NWI Total	NWI without Industry
20 tons	32 tons	71 tons	14.6 tons

Figure 4- 25: Comparison of 2017 GHG Emissions Per Person

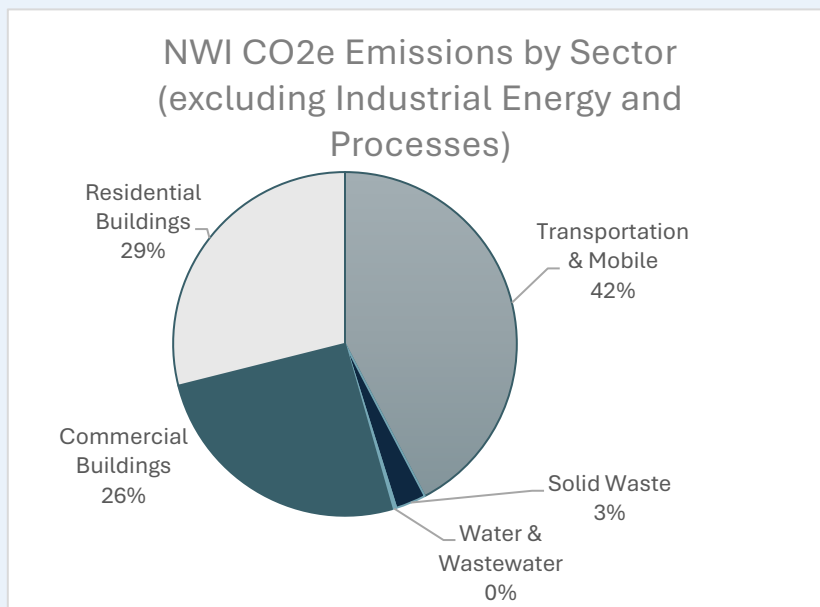


Figure 4-26: Northwest Indiana 2017 GHG Baseline Emissions without Industry

A significant proportion of greenhouse gas emissions in Northwest Indiana are attributable to the high-energy industries that provide steel, cement, and fuel for the entire Midwest. Excluding industrial emissions and energy use completely yields a per-person annual emission rate of 14.6 tons. Without industry, the regional greenhouse gas emissions baseline shrinks to 11.2 MMT, with source allocations of 42% transportation and mobile sources, 29% residential heating and electricity, and 26% commercial heating and electricity. Solid Waste Management rises to 3%. Forests,

Trees, and Wetlands reduce the annual emissions by an estimated 1% each year.

After industry, transportation, and mobile sources remain the largest emitters of CO₂e in the region. Despite decades of investment in infrastructure projects to reduce traffic congestion and in the auto industry's efforts to improve energy efficiency, light-duty gasoline vehicles generate over 3.3 MMT per year. Heavy-duty diesel vehicles generate approximately 1.9 MMT.

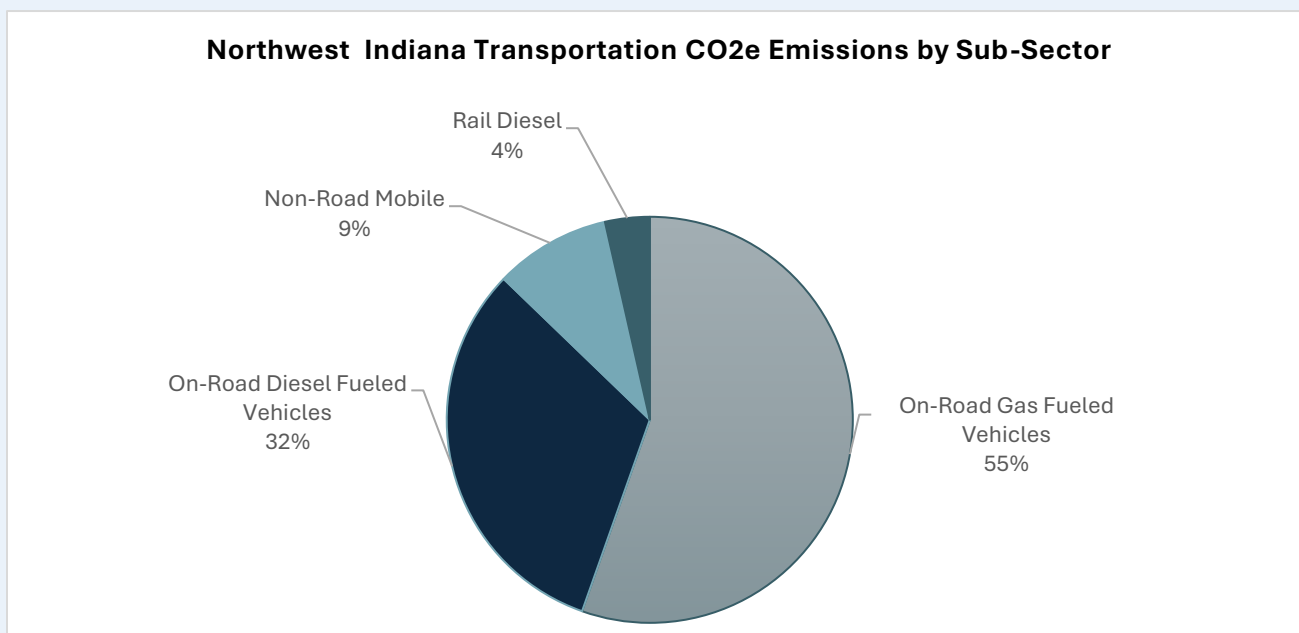


Figure 4-27: Northwest Indiana 2017 GHG Baseline Transportation Source Sector Emissions

GREEN ENERGY AND FUELS

Electric and Plug-in Hybrid Vehicles

Replacing gas and diesel with electric vehicles can reduce the harmful emissions that negatively affect air quality and the respiratory health of the region's residents and contribute to climate change.

Most of the region appears to have a solid distribution of public electric vehicle charging stations, particularly in the most populous areas. Gaps in infrastructure are visible in Gary, East Chicago, southern Porter County, and southern and eastern LaPorte County.

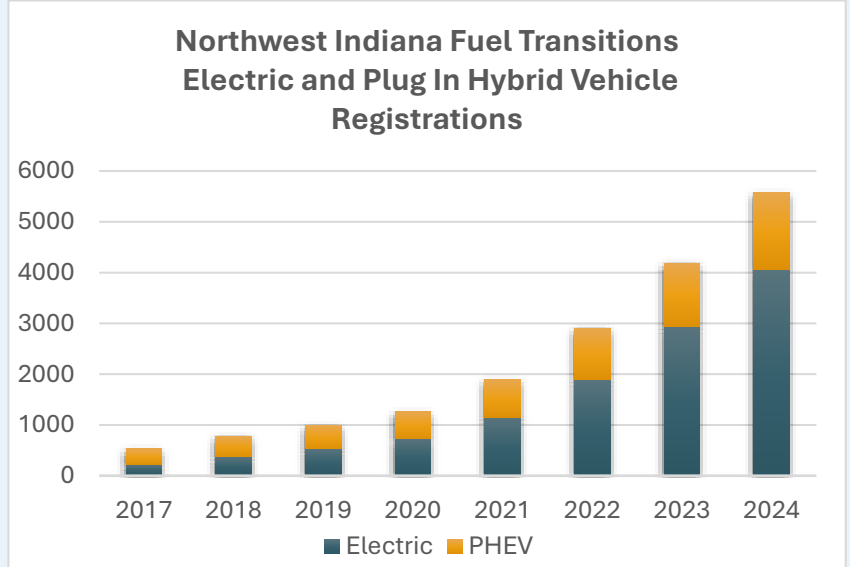


Figure 4- 28: Electric Vehicle Registrations in Northwest Indiana

Alternative Fuel Corridors

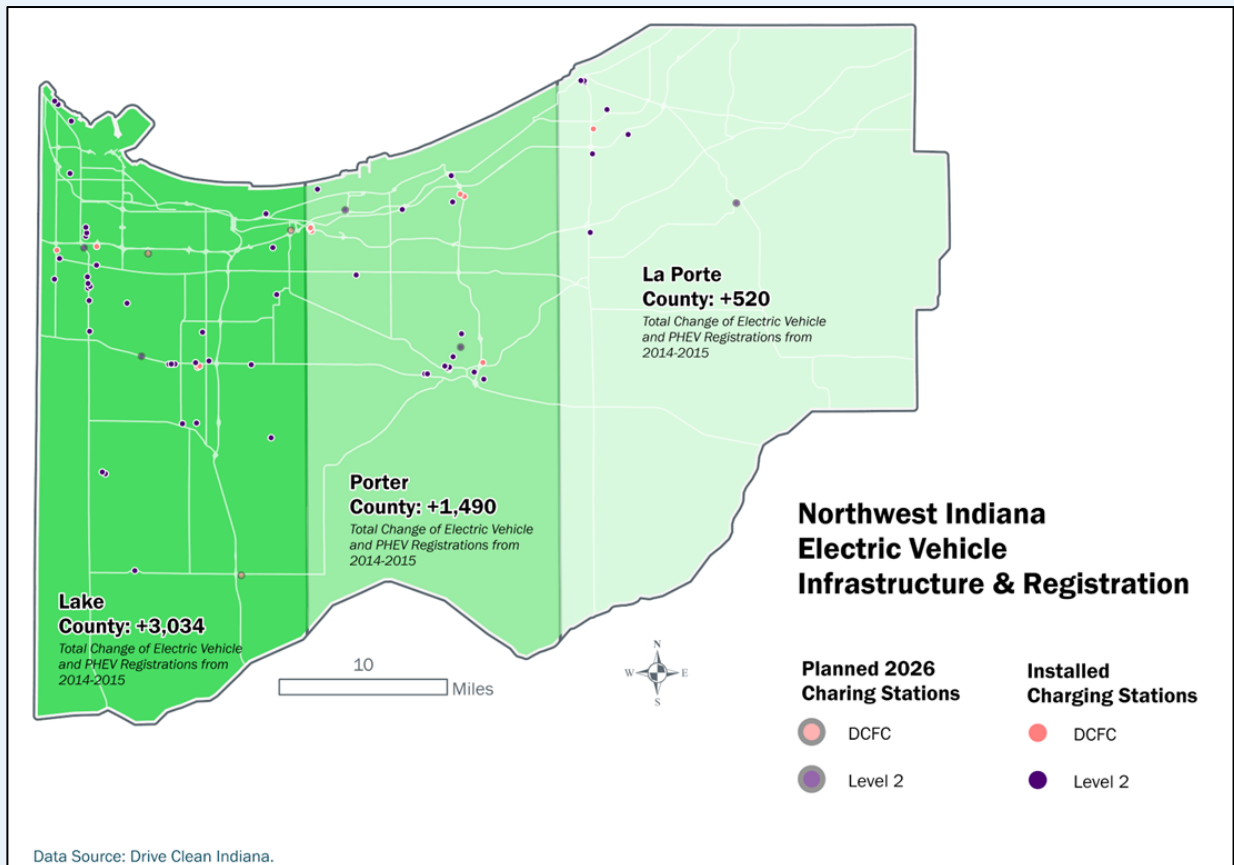


Figure 4- 29: Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Distribution

Diversifying fuel choices has been an objective in Northwest Indiana for many years and for many reasons. Reducing air pollution from vehicles through cleaner fuels is a focus of NIRPC. The Alternative Fuel Corridor program was created by the U.S. Department of Energy to prioritize investment and help drivers locate fueling infrastructure for cleaner-burning fuels. In the region, I-80, I-90, I-94, I-65, US-30, and US-41 have all been designated as corridors for one or more alternative fuels.

Fuel Type	Designated Alternative Fuel Corridor		
	Miles Designated	% Ready	Miles Pending
Electric	174.5	49.4 %	88.4
Compressed Natural Gas	113.1	73.8 %	29.7
Hydrogen	40.5	0	40.5
Liquefied Natural Gas	52.3	0	52.3
Liquefied Petroleum Gas	113.1	73.8 %	29.6

Figure 4-30: Designated Alternative Dual Corridor Miles and Status

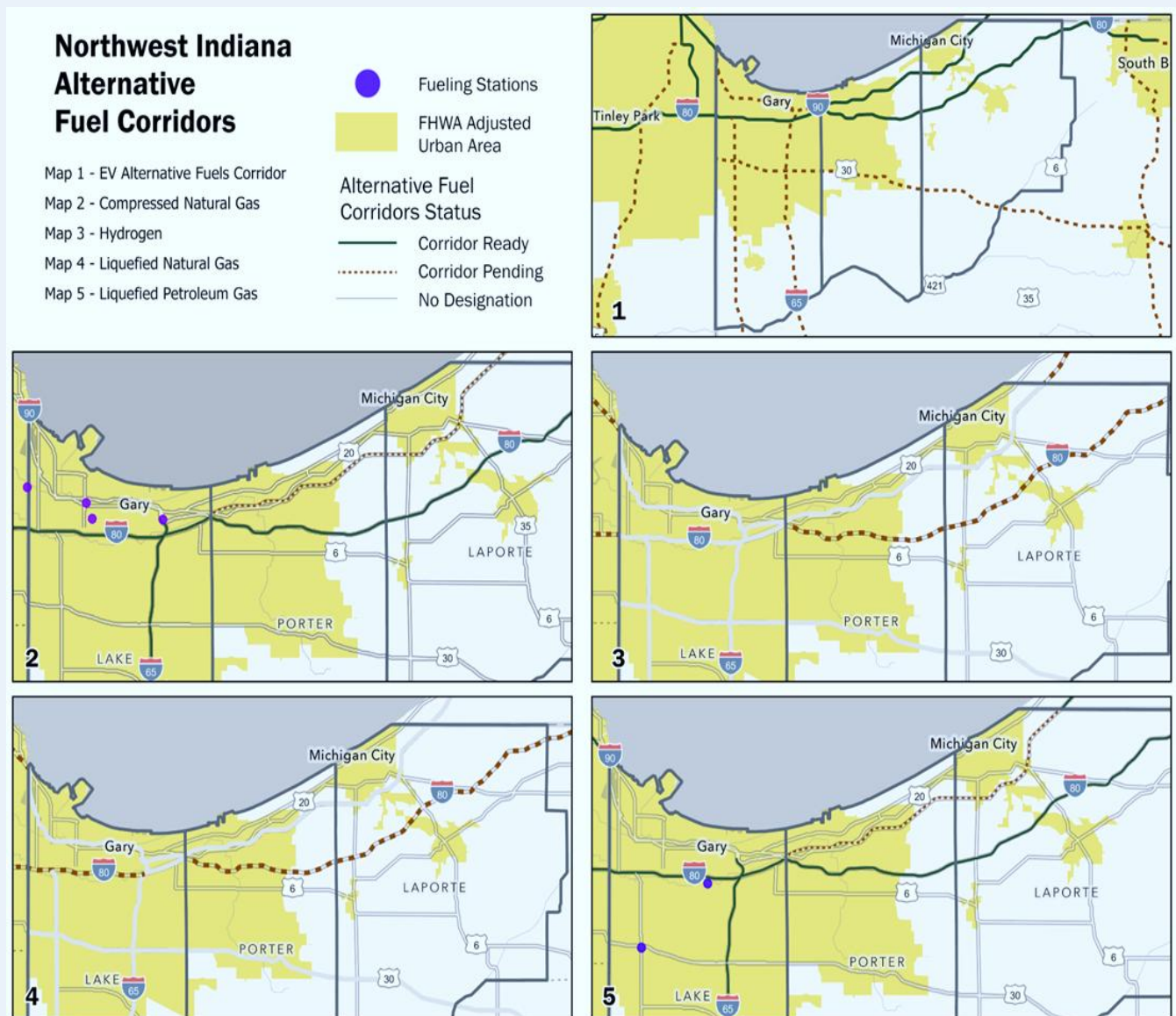


Figure 4-31: Alternative Fuel Corridors in Northwest Indiana

Sustainability

As part of the *NWI Regional Climate Action Plan* process, NWI Region Resilience, a coalition of community climate and environmental advocacy groups, adopted a goal of expanding the number of municipalities that activate officially recognized sustainability or environmental boards and commissions with an interest in focusing on additional climate action or resiliency planning.

As of 2025, baseline greenhouse gas inventories have been completed for all 3 Northwest Indiana counties and 14 municipalities (41%). 8 (20%) of municipalities have a formal Sustainability or Environmental Board or Commission. Two local governments created a staff position for sustainability. The City of Gary has completed both a climate action plan and a climate resiliency plan.

Climate planning is not the only activity local communities undertake to enhance sustainability. Drawing on the State of Minnesota's GreenStep Cities initiative, NIRPC outlined a menu of 29 best practices summarizing 175 unique actions across 5 categories in the *Sensible Tools Handbook for Indiana+*.

GreenStep Cities Action Categories	
Buildings and Lighting	5 Best Practices
Land Use	5 Best Practices
Transportation	4 Best Practices
Environmental Management	9 Best Practices
Resilient Economic & Community Development	6 Best Practices

Figure 4-32: GreenStep Cities Best Practices.

Many are also addressed in the Land Use and Transportation chapters of this Profile. These are evaluated and tracked in different chapters of *NWI 2050+* for the entire region.

5- FREIGHT

NWI 2050+ includes five goals with a total of ten measures to measure the performance of freight at the regional level, as shown in Figure 5-1 below:

Goal Number	Goals (In Bold) and Associated Performance Measures
1	Stimulate economic competitiveness and growth
	1. Freight-related industry employment
	2. Volume of goods moved through the region by mode
	3. Value of goods moved through the region by mode
2	Reduce and mitigate freight safety and security risks
	4. Number of truck-involved crashes
	5. Number of freight rail incidents
3	Reduce and eliminate barriers to efficient mobility
	6. Truck Travel Time Reliability Index (TTTRI) on the Interstate System
	7. Annual number and duration of blocked highway-rail crossings
4	Maintain, preserve, and extend the service life of existing infrastructure
	8. Percentage of pavements in good, fair, and poor condition on the state-owned highway system
	9. Number of bridges on the NHS in poor condition
5	Preserve natural and community resources by reducing the negative environmental impacts of freight activities
	10. FEMA National Risk Index

Figure 5-1: NWI 2050+ Freight Goals and Associated Performance Measures

FREIGHT GOAL #1: STIMULATE ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS AND GROWTH

NWI 2050+ includes three performance measures to track the economic competitiveness and growth of the Northwest Indiana region: freight-related industry employment, the volume of goods moved through the region by mode, and the value of goods moved through the region by mode.

Performance Measure #1: Freight-related industry employment

Measuring freight-related industry employment is an important indicator of how aligned the regional workforce is toward freight. *NWI 2050+* defines “freight related” industries as seven two-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes: 11 (agriculture), 21 (mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction), 23 (construction), 31-33 (manufacturing), 42 (wholesale trade), 44-45 (retail trade), and 48-49 (transportation and warehousing). Freight-related industry employment grew from 117,756 in 2019 to 120,024 in 2024, as shown in Figure 5-2 below.



Figure 5-2: Freight Related Employment Trend in Northwest Indiana, 2019-2024 (Source: BLS QCEW)

Performance Measure #2: Volume of goods moved through the region by mode

The region is producing and consuming more goods, indicating regional economic growth. Additionally, it is useful to examine trends across freight modes to see how each is performing and to better understand how the multimodal freight system could be improved to alleviate pressure on certain modes and offer greater convenience to others. Figure 5-3 below shows the trend in the volume of goods moved by mode from 2017 to 2024, measured by weight, for cargo originating in or destined to the Northwest Indiana region.

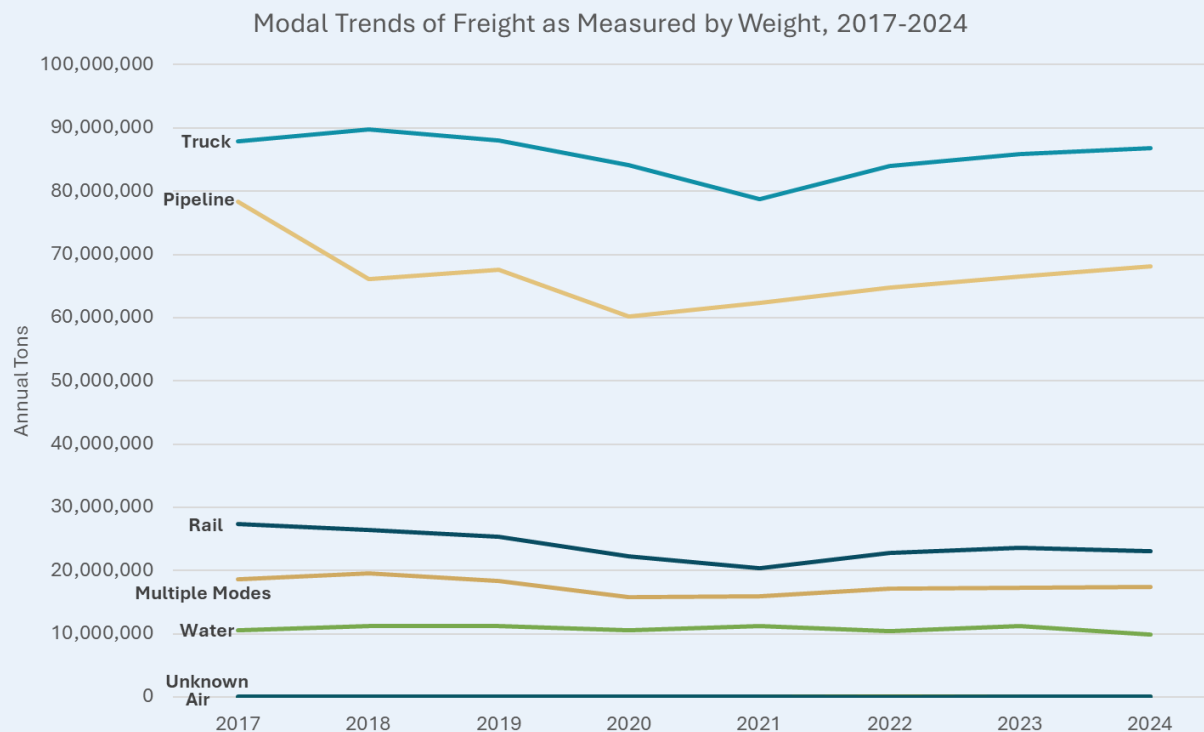


Figure 5-3: Weight of Cargo Originating From or Destined To Northwest Indiana, 2017-2024 (Source: Freight Analysis Framework 5 for Region 181, which includes Newton and Jasper counties)

Figure 5-3 shows that overall, the weight of cargo moving through the region has remained relatively flat from 2017-2024. However, there were some declines during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and since the pandemic, the weight of cargo has increased. Trucking has remained the dominant mode followed closely by pipeline, with rail a distant third and air only a tiny fraction of the freight mode share as measured by weight. The region moves a large amount of freight, moving a total of 222.7 million tons in 2017 and 205.1 million tons in 2024, though the weight dropped down to 188.8 million tons in 2021. It is important to note that these figures do not capture the significant amount of freight solely moving through the region without an origin or destination in the region.

Performance Measure #2: Value of goods moved through the region by mode

It is important to consider not only volume of goods but also their value, since some industries such as biomedical and retail may move goods that are lightweight but have a high monetary value. Figure 5-4 below shows the trend in the value of goods moved by mode from 2017 to 2024 as measured by value of the cargo either originating in, or destined to, the Northwest Indiana region.

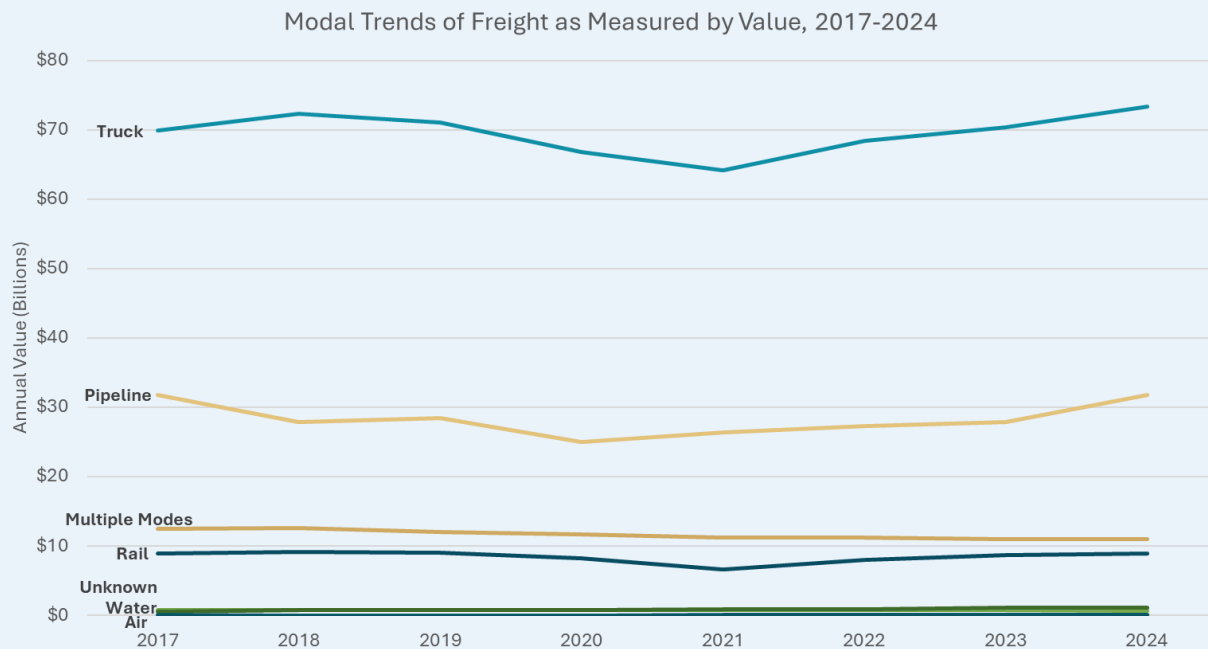


Figure 5-4: Value of Cargo Originating From or Destined To Northwest Indiana, 2017-2024 (Source: Freight Analysis Framework 5 for Region 181, which includes Newton and Jasper counties)

Figure 5-4 shows that overall, the value of cargo moving through the region has remained relatively flat from 2017-2024, especially considering that these figures are in nominal dollars, not adjusted for inflation. Similar to the trend of cargo weight, cargo value did dip slightly during the pandemic and has rebounded modestly since. Truck dominated as a mode, even more so when measured by cargo value than by weight, with pipeline a distant second. Rail, which generally carries lower value, higher weight goods, is even lower than multiple modes when measured by value. The mode share of air is a bit higher when measured by value than by weight, but it is still a small fraction of the overall mode share of freight value. The region also moved a significant amount of freight as measured by value, moving \$124.5 billion in 2017 and \$127.0 billion in 2024, dipping as low as \$110.1 billion in 2021, but these figures are all in nominal year-of dollars, so adjusted for inflation, the region moved a higher relative value of cargo in 2017 than in 2024. Similarly to the cargo weight trend, this performance measure of cargo value does not capture cargo solely moving through the region due to data limitations.

FREIGHT GOAL #2: REDUCE AND MITIGATE FREIGHT SAFETY AND SECURITY RISKS

NWI 2050+ includes two performance measures to track freight safety and security risks: the number of truck-involved crossings and the number of freight rail incidents. While safety and security are important for the water, air, and pipeline modes, insufficient local-scale data has resulted in these other modes not being recommended for performance-measurement tracking.

Performance Measure #4: Truck-involved crashes

Measuring the number and severity of truck-involved crashes is an important indicator of how safely trucks are traversing the critical crossroads region of Northwest Indiana. Moreover, examining where truck-involved crashes occur most frequently helps identify priority locations for transportation projects as well as locations for discussion with INDOT. The total number of truck-involved crashes was lower during the COVID-19 Pandemic but has remained relatively stable since as shown in Figure 5-5 below.

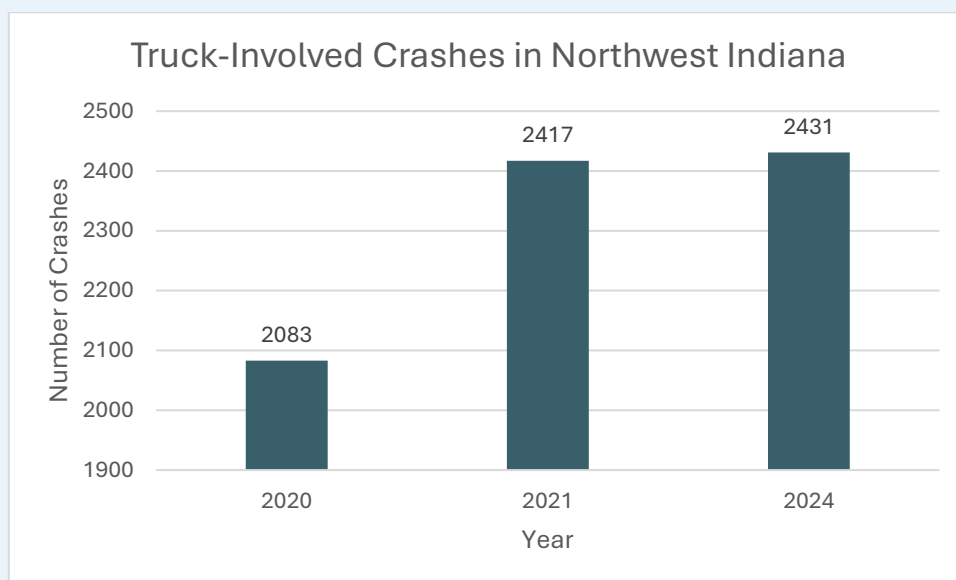


Figure 5-5: Number of Truck-Involved Crashes in 2020, 2021, and 2024 (Source: ARIES)

Figure 5-6 below shows the location heatmap of truck-involved crashes from 2024 crash data.

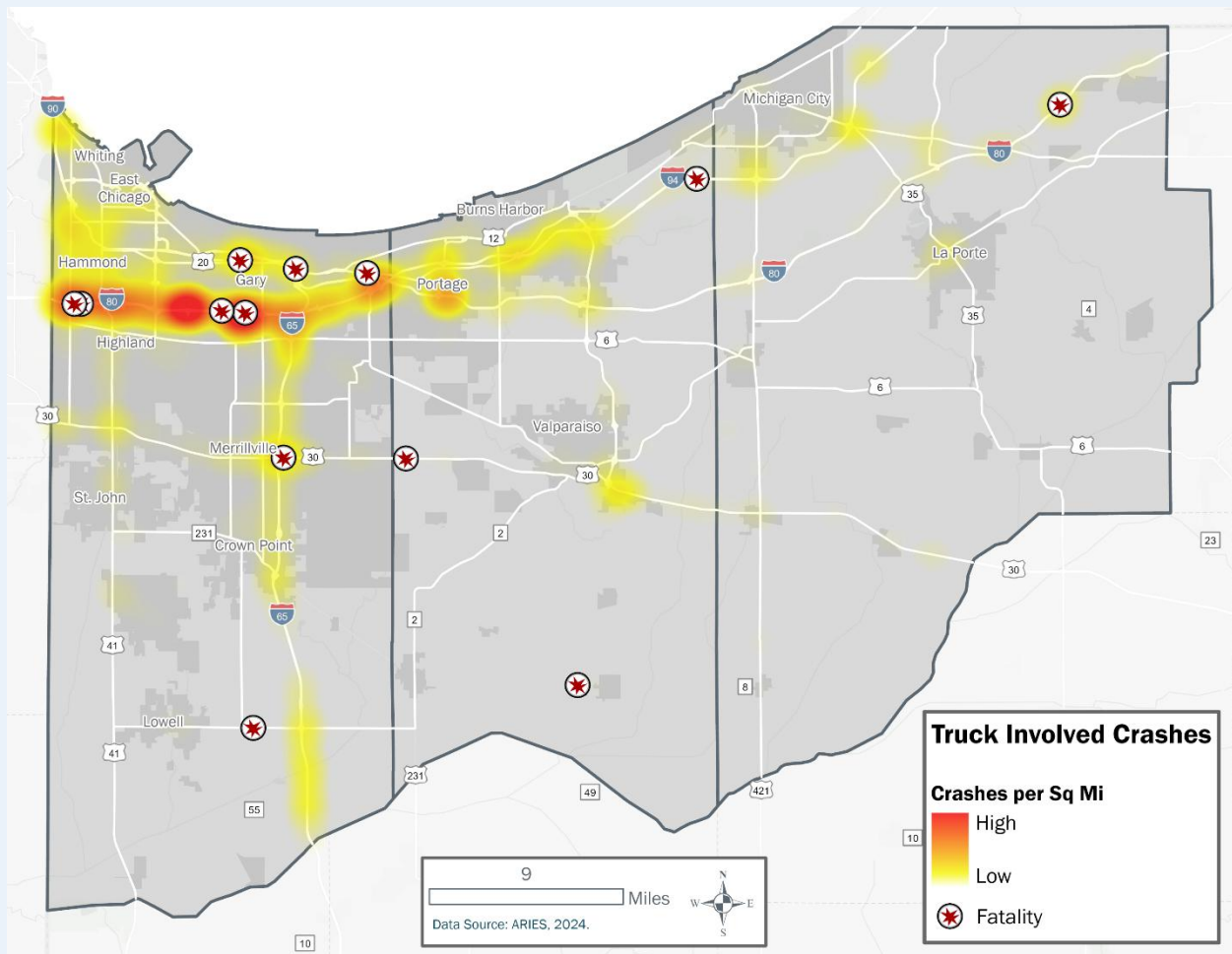


Figure 5-6: Heatmap of Truck-involved Crashes, 2024 (Source: ARIES 2024)

Figure 5-6 shows that truck-involved crashes are clustered most densely around the Interstate Highway System as well as corridors with the highest truck volumes and are concentrated near interchanges and major intersections. I-80/94 west of I-65 in particular saw a large amount of truck crashes, and this corridor also featured a significantly high share of the region's truck-involved crash fatalities.

Performance Measure #5: Freight rail incidents

NIRPC tracks three types of freight rail incidents: non-crossing, highway-rail crossing, and trespassing. Non-crossing incidents are any type of incident that affects freight rail outside of a highway-rail crossing area and not involving any trespasser. Such incidents may include equipment failure, derailments, naturally caused obstructions, etc. Highway-rail crossing incidents include both vehicular traffic and active transportation users at designated crossing locations. Trespassing incidents include any incident involving an unauthorized vehicle or person struck by a train regardless of whether the incident involves suicide or attempted suicide. Figure 5-7 below shows the trend in the number of each type of freight rail incident from 2021 to 2025.

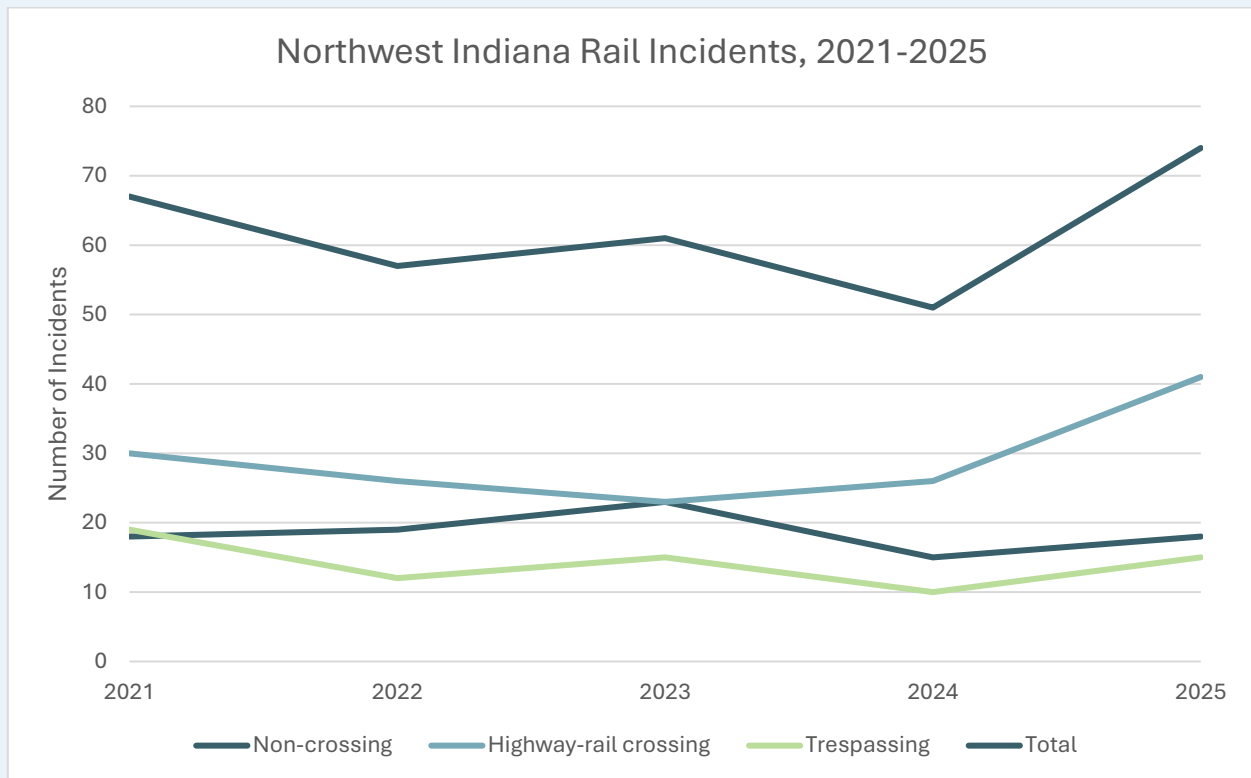


Figure 5-7: Freight Rail Incidents in Northwest Indiana, 2021-2025 (Source: FRA)

Figure 5-7 shows that while freight rail incidents declined slightly from 2021 through 2024, they spiked somewhat in 2025, driven primarily by highway-rail crossing incidents. Addressing not only the congestion issue at highway-rail crossings but also their safety has been a high legislative priority for NIRPC. Overall, the total number of freight rail incidents climbed from 67 in 2021 to 74 in 2025, highlighting a disturbing trend.

FREIGHT GOAL #3: REDUCE AND ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO EFFICIENT MOBILITY

NWI 2050+ includes two performance measures to track the efficiency of freight mobility: truck travel time reliability index (TTTRI) on the Interstate System and the annual number and duration of blocked highway-rail crossings. Once again, the mobility of water, air, and pipeline modes is important, but there is insufficient local-level data for NWI 2050+ to recommend any mobility performance measures for these modes. It should be noted that TTTRI on the Interstate System is a federally required performance measure that NIRPC reports on through the NWI 2050+ System Performance Report, and it is technically a measure of reliability, not mobility, but in the context of the Northwest Indiana Interstate System, mobility is highly correlated with reliability and is used as a proxy to measure progress toward this goal.

Performance Measure #6: Truck travel time reliability index (TTTRI) on the Interstate System

TTTRI on the Interstate System measures the consistency of travel times. A greater level of reliability allows truck drivers to plan their routes knowing approximately how long it will take to reach their destination. This is a federally required performance measure, and NWI 2050+ recommends that it be tracked as part of the Freight Chapter, in addition to the System Performance Report, which contains all federally required performance measures. Overall, TTTRI in the region has remained high, meaning less reliable truck travel times, as shown in Figure 5-8.

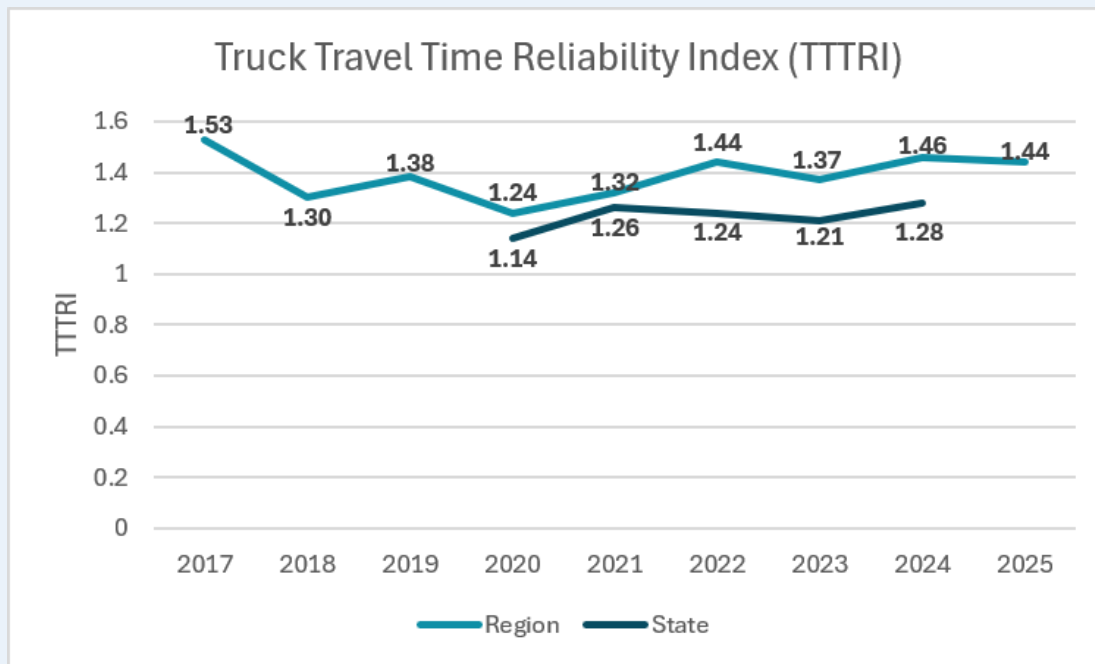


Figure 5-8: Interstate Truck Travel Time Reliability Index (TTTRI) in the Region and State, 2017-2025 (Source: NPMRDS)

Figure 5-8 shows that TTTRI on the Interstates remained higher (less reliable truck travel times) in Northwest Indiana than statewide in every year from 2020 through 2024. Additionally, there was a slight improvement in TTTRI during the pandemic, but since then TTTRI has increased yet appears to have plateaued beginning in 2024. In addition to the overall trend of Interstate TTTRI, it is helpful to look at the geographic representation of where Interstate TTTRI is highest. Figure 5-9 below shows a map of Interstate TTTRI in the region.

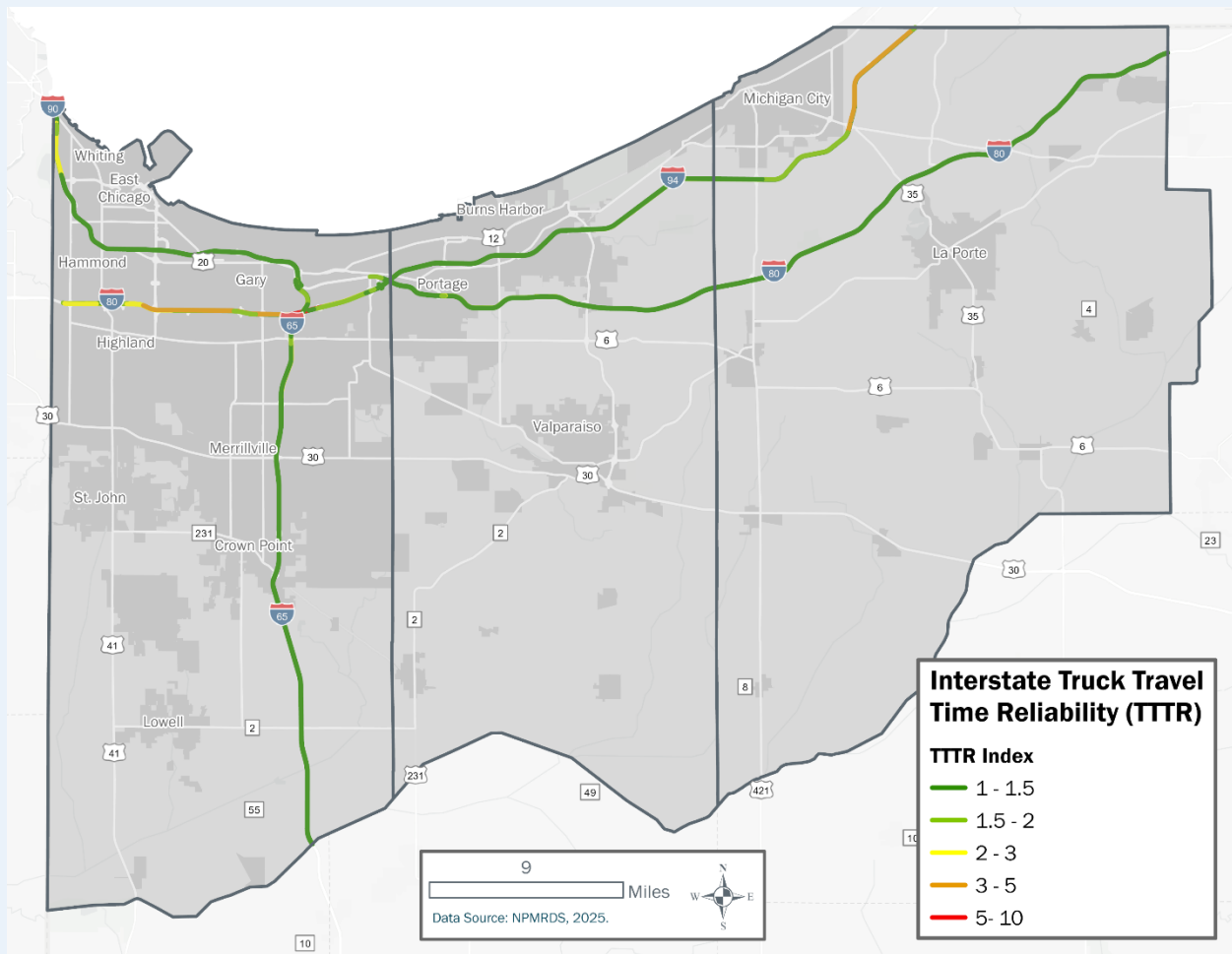
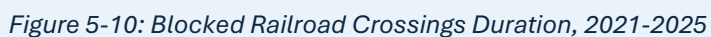


Figure 5-9: Interstate Truck Travel Time Reliability Index (TTTRI), 2025

Figure 5-9 shows that in 2025, Interstate TTTRI was worst on I-80/94 west of I-65 and on I-94 near the Michigan state line, while most other Interstate Highway segments performed well. Interstate TTTRI fluctuates somewhat year to year, depending on roadwork locations.

Measuring the annual number and duration of blocked highway-rail crossings is a useful indicator of two modes: not only how well the freight rail system is performing, but also how great an impact poorly performing freight rail activity has on road users. It should be noted that there are a few passenger rail lines in the region that could also potentially cause blockage issues, and this measure does not distinguish between freight and passenger rail, but the vast majority of rail activity in Northwest Indiana is freight. Figure 5-9 below shows the blocked railroad crossings and durations in the region from 2021 to 2025.



96

FREIGHT GOAL #4: MAINTAIN, PRESERVE, AND EXTEND THE SERVICE LIFE OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

NWI 2050+ established two performance measures in support of this goal: percentage of pavements in good, fair, and poor condition on the state-owned highway system and number of bridges on the NHS in poor condition. *NWI 2050+* recommends tracking all three conditions for pavements because of the importance of proactive asset management, not just a worst-first strategy. Tracking only poor condition bridges is recommended because that is the performance measure that directly corresponds to the federally required penalty if a certain threshold of bridges are in poor condition.

Performance Measure #8: Percentage of pavements in good, fair, and poor condition on the state-owned highway system

Maintaining pavements on the state-owned highway system in a state of good repair helps to ensure that trucks can move freight safely and efficiently and not be tempted to drive on non-state routes. A description of the pavement condition performance measures can be found in the Roads and Highways section below.

Performance Measure #9: Number of bridges on the National Highway System (NHS) in poor condition

It is critically important to prevent bridges on the NHS from falling into poor condition, as trucks rely on these bridges to move freight through the region and to destinations beyond. A description of the bridge condition performance measures can be found in the Roads and Highways section below.

FREIGHT GOAL #5: PRESERVE NATURAL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES BY REDUCING THE NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF FREIGHT ACTIVITIES

NWI 2050+ includes only one performance measures related to the goal of reducing the negative environmental impacts of freight activities: the FEMA National Risk Index.

Performance Measure #10: FEMA National Risk Index

FEMA publishes a National Risk Index for all counties in the United States. NIRPC tracks the National Risk Index for Lake County because it is consistently the highest (meaning the highest risk) out of the three counties in the region. The 2025 National Risk Index for Lake County was 95.9. Unfortunately, the methodology for calculating the National Risk Index has changed significantly since NIRPC first began measuring it, so it is not possible to examine trends before the 2025 baseline of 95.9. Nevertheless, NIRPC will continue to monitor performance of the FEMA National Risk Index with a target for the index to decrease.

6- ROADS AND HIGHWAYS

The *NWI 2050+* Roads and Highways Chapter contains four goals that correspond to objectives and performance measures that can be tracked over time: accessibility, infrastructure condition, mobility, and safety.

Goal	Objectives (In Bold) and Associated Performance Measures
Accessibility	Northwest Indiana's residents are able to access jobs both within and outside the region, and Northwest Indiana's jobs attract talent from both within and outside the region
	Number of average daily commutes into and out of the region
	Commute mode share percentages
Infrastructure Condition	Leaders prioritize maintaining roadway and highway pavements in satisfactory condition in the Northwest Indiana region
	Annual numbers of communities funded and the regional funding total of Community Crossings Matching Grant Program (CCMGP) funds
Mobility	Northwest Indiana residents and freight carriers can expect to travel at reliable and safe speeds on the region's roadway network
	Mean speed on the National Highway System (NHS)
Safety	Leaders seek to reduce crashes and injuries and eliminate fatalities on the region's roadways
	5-year moving annual average of all crashes in the region
	5-year moving annual average of injury crashes in the region
	5-year moving annual average of fatal crashes in the region

Figure 6-1: *NWI 2050+ Roads Goals, Objectives, and Associated Performance Measures* (Note: pavement condition and bridge condition performance measures are included in the Freight section)

ROADS GOAL #1: ACCESSIBILITY

NWI 2050+ articulates one objective and two performance measures related to accessibility. The objective states that Northwest Indiana's residents can access jobs both within and outside the region, and that Northwest Indiana's jobs attract talent from both within and outside the region. The two performance measures related to this goal are the average daily number of commutes into and out of the region and the commute-mode share percentages.

Performance Measure #1: Number of average daily commutes into and out of the region

The *NWI 2050+* Roads and Highways Chapter includes the number of average daily commutes into and out of the region as a performance measure because this trend can be measured with readily available data and supports the goal of an accessible region where residents can access jobs and where businesses can attract talent from outside the region. StatsIndiana includes detailed county-level commute trends sourced from IT-40 tax returns. Using these data, the infographics in Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate commute patterns for 2016 (Figure 1) and 2023 (Figure 2).

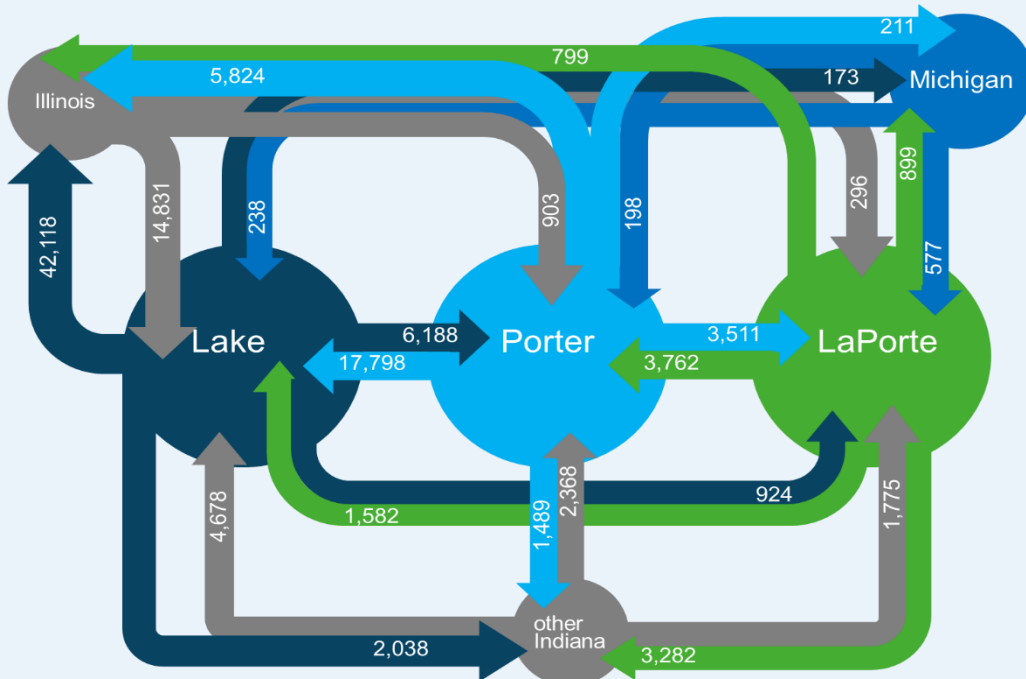


Figure 6-2: Average Daily Commutes into, within, and out of the Region, 2016 (Source: StatsIndiana)

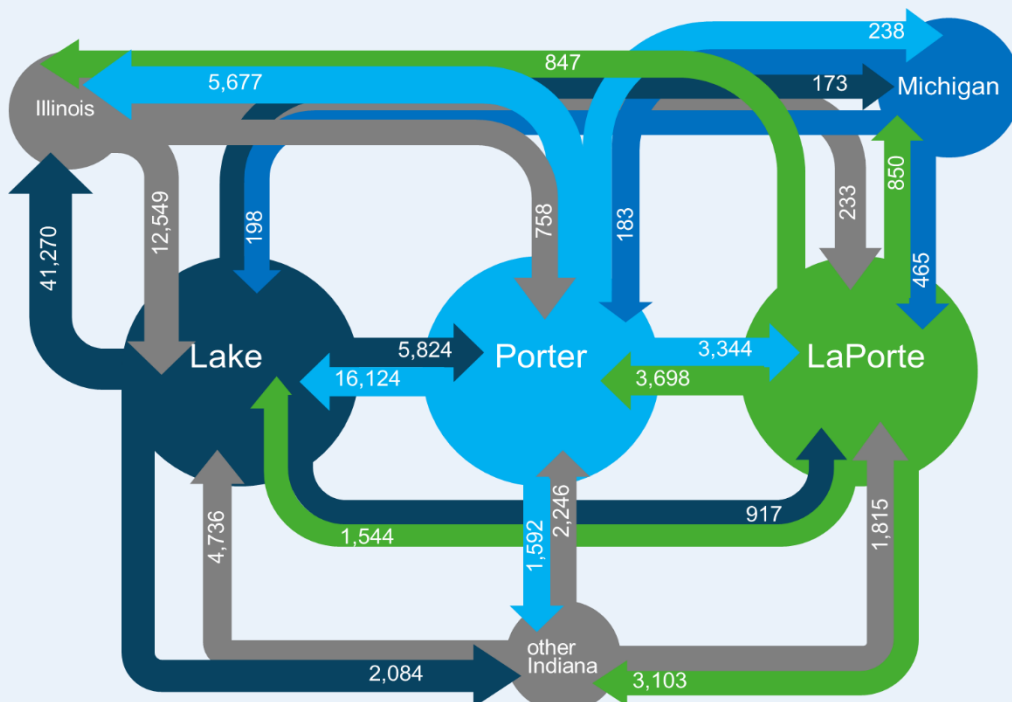


Figure 6-3: Average Daily Commutes into, within, and out of the Region, 2023 (Source: StatsIndiana)

Comparing Figures 6-2 and 6-3 shows that the overall pattern of commuters did not change significantly between 2016 and 2023, indicating a stable workforce. Overall, the number of commuters entering the region decreased from 25,864 to 23,183, and the number of commuters leaving the region decreased from 56,833 to 55,834 between 2016 and 2023. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these trends remain remarkably stable, suggesting a resilient workforce and a road network that adequately accommodates commuters.

Performance Measure #2: Commute mode share percentages

NWI 2050+ expands on the federally required performance measure of non-Single Occupancy Vehicle (non-SOV) commute mode share percentage to include all Census-tracked mode shares for commuters in the region. This performance measure indicates how effectively various modes serve commuters and how reliant commuters are on SOV. Figure 6-4 below shows the commute mode share percentages for commuters in the region in 2017.

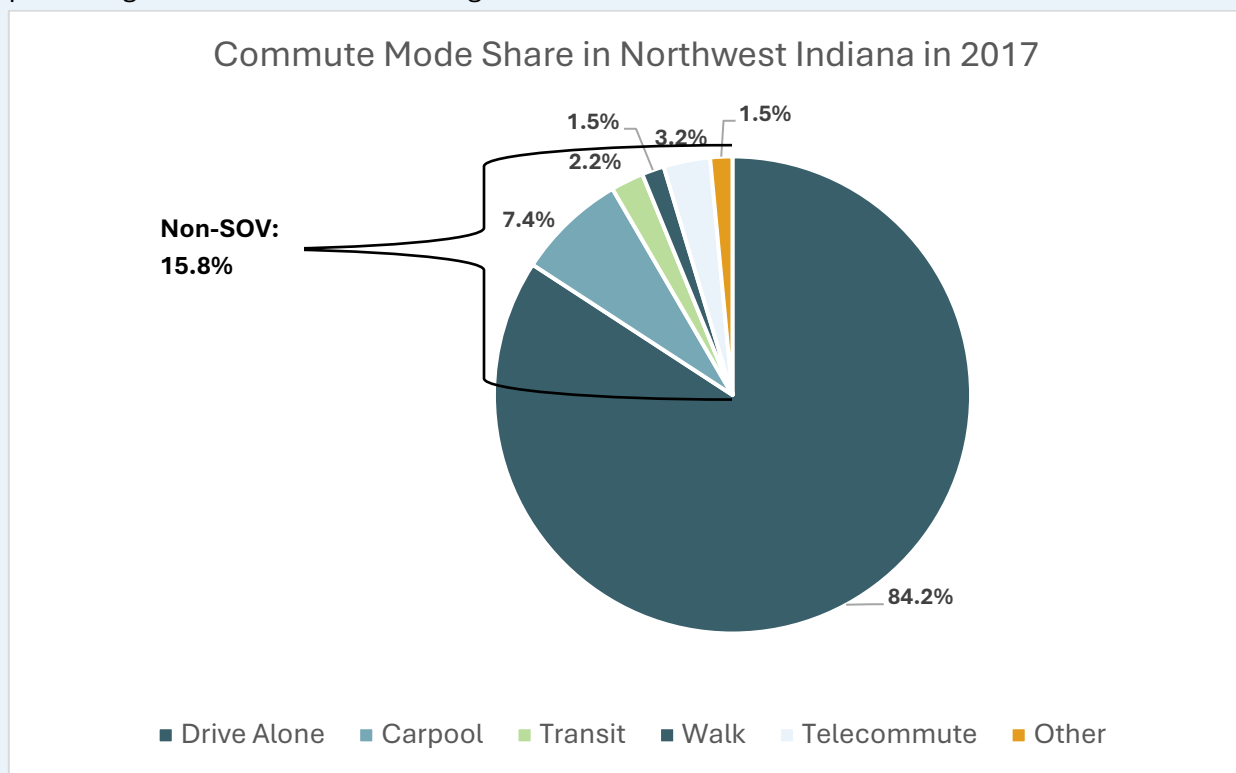


Figure 6-4: Commute Mode Share Percentages in the Region in 2017 with Percent Non-SOV (Source: ACS 2017)

Figure 6-4 shows that in 2017, driving alone (SOV) was by far the most popular commute mode share in the region, with 84.2% of commuters choosing this option. Carpooling was the most popular non-SOV option, accounting for 7.4% of all commuters, with telecommuting a distant third at 3.2%. The 15.8% non-SOV mode share in the region in 2017 was well below the entire Chicago, IL-IN Urban Area (UA) baseline level of 31.2% in 2017. Figure 6-5 below shows the commute mode share percentages for commuters in the region in 2024.

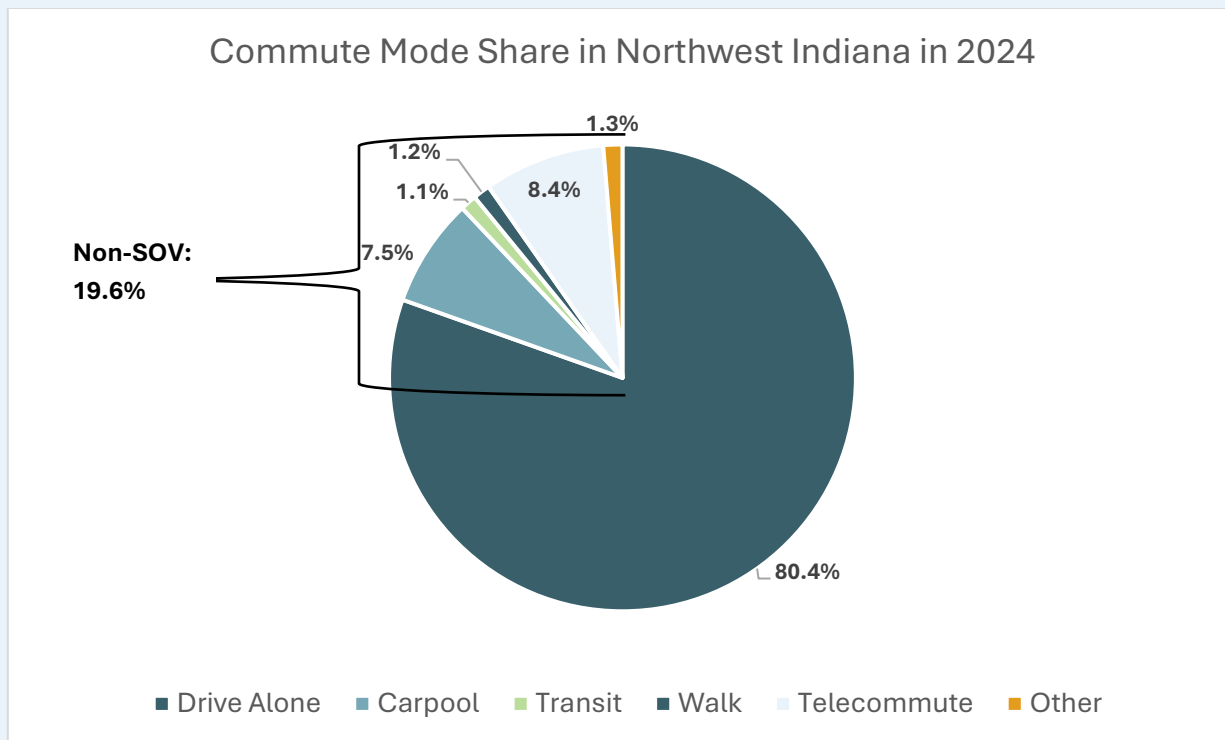


Figure 6-5: Commute Mode Share Percentages in the Region in 2024 with Percent Non-SOV (Source: ACS 2024)

Figure 6-5 shows that driving alone (SOV) remains the predominant commute mode in the region. However, the trend shows that the share of SOV decreased, while the share of telecommuting more than doubled between 2017 and 2024. Carpooling remained largely unchanged, though it was surpassed by telecommuting as the second most common commute mode by 2024. The share of transit halved between 2017 and 2024, though there is potential for a rebound given that the 2024 data probably show some lag, being a 5-year sample, and the NICTD Monon Corridor has opened. Accordingly, the telecommute commute share is likely to have peaked by 2024, given this data time lag. Finally, Figure 6-5 shows that the region’s non-SOV percentage of 19.6% in 2024 is well below the 2024 target of 32.7% in the entire Chicago, IL-IN UA. However, since the performance in the Indiana portion of the region improved by 3.8% in seven years, well more than the 1.5% improvement called for from baseline to target in the Chicago, IL-IN UA, it is reasonable to conclude that the Indiana portion of the Chicago, IL-IN UA is supporting the 2024 non-SOV target.

ROADS GOAL #2: INFRASTRUCTURE CONDITION

The *NWI 2050+* Roads and Highways Chapter includes two objectives and three performance measures related to infrastructure condition. The first objective states that leaders prioritize maintaining roadway and highway pavements in satisfactory condition in the Northwest Indiana region. The two corresponding performance measures are the assessed condition of pavement quality on the state-owned highway system and the annual number of communities funded and regional funding total of Community Crossings Matching Grant Program (CCMG) funds. The first performance measure is outcome-based, showing how the state is managing its pavements, while the second performance measure is capacity-based, showing the financial capacity of communities (using one key source of funds) to manage their pavements. The second objective states that leaders prioritize maintaining bridges in a state of good repair in the Northwest Indiana region.

Performance Measure #3: Percentage of pavements in good, fair, and poor condition on the state-owned highway system

Maintaining pavements in a satisfactory condition ensures that road users are able to safely and efficiently navigate the vast roadway and highway network and to see that their taxes are spent effectively. Consequently, pavement condition is not only a performance measure in *NWI 2050+* but is also a federally required performance measure. Reliable data is only available to assess the pavement condition on the state-owned highway system, so this performance measure only examines the state network. Figure 6-6 below shows the percentages of state-owned lane miles in good, fair, and poor condition in Northwest Indiana in 2019 and 2023.

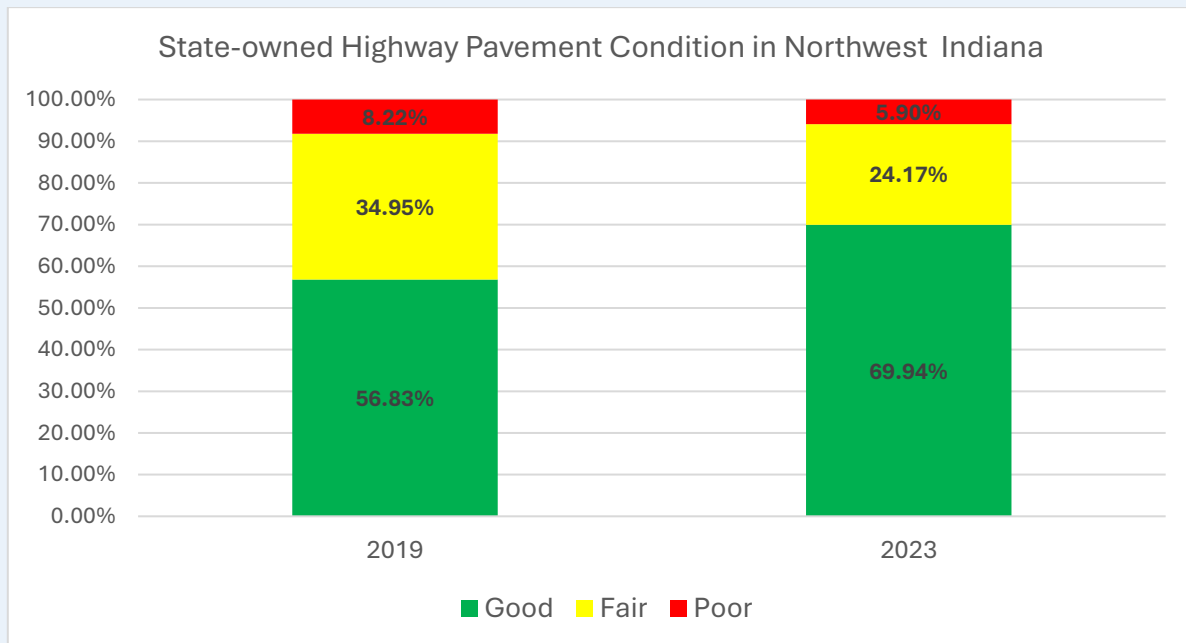


Figure 6-6: State-owned Highway Pavement Condition in Northwest Indiana in 2019 and 2023 by Percentages of Lane Miles (Source: HPMS)

Figure 6-6 shows that INDOT is performing well at maintaining pavements in mainly good and fair condition, with improvement between 2019 and 2023. Figure 6-7 below shows the federally required performance measure of how INDOT is performing maintaining Interstate Highway pavements in the entire State of Indiana, and Figure 6-8 below shows the federally required performance measure of how

owners of the non-Interstate National Highway System (NHS) are performing maintaining those pavements.

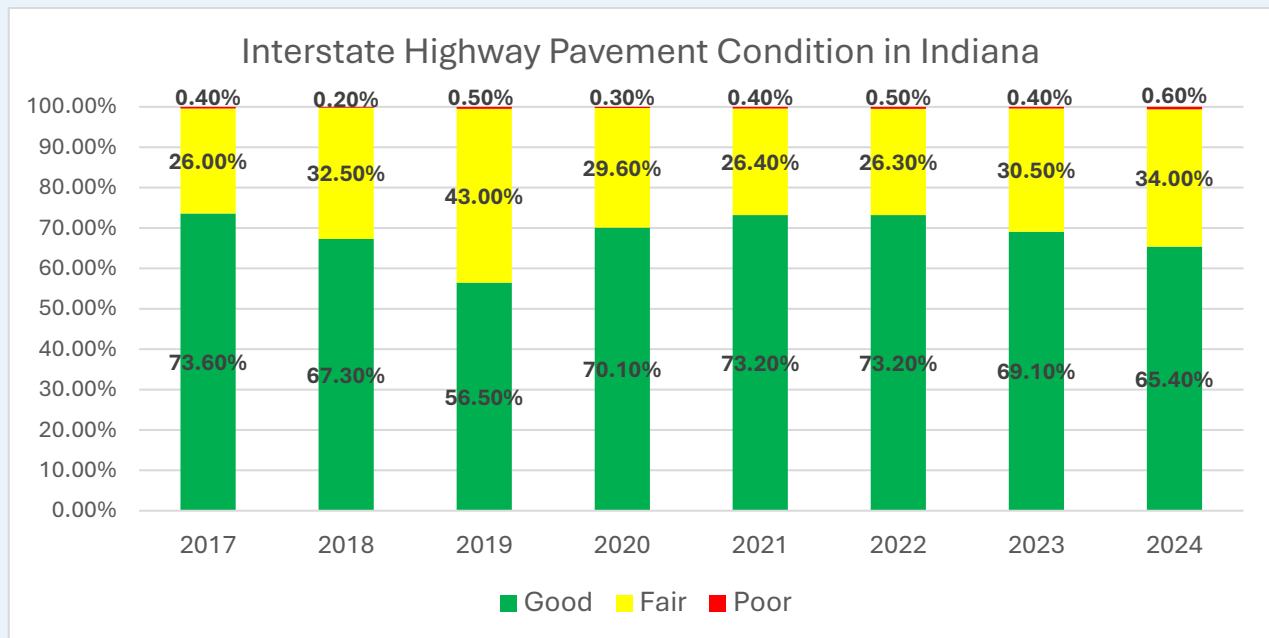


Figure 6-7: Interstate Highway Pavement Condition in Indiana by Percentages of Lane Miles (Source: HPMS)

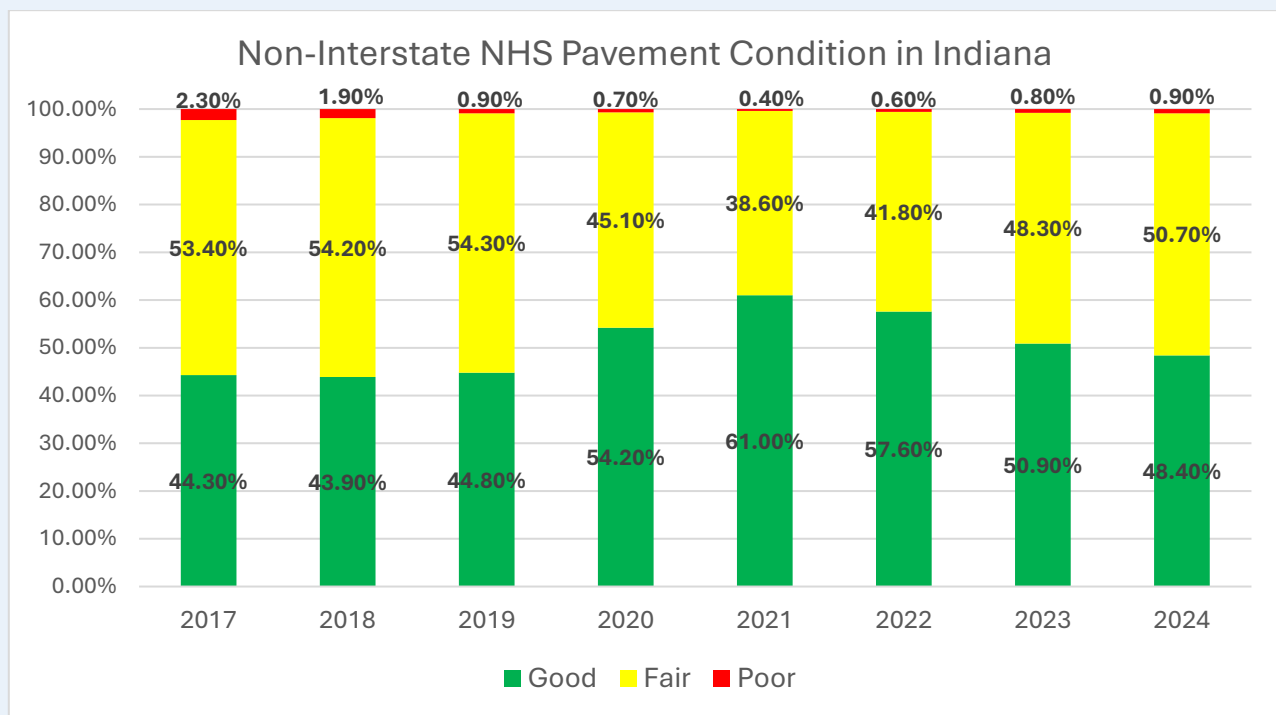


Figure 6-8: Non-Interstate NHS Pavement Condition in Indiana by Percentages of Lane Miles (Source: HPMS)

Figures 6-7 and 6-8 show that INDOT and the other owners of the NHS are adequately maintaining pavements on the Interstate Highway System and non-Interstate NHS. The main difference is that the percentage of lane miles on the Interstate Highway System in good condition is significantly higher than the percentage of lane miles on the non-Interstate NHS in good condition, but the percentages in poor condition are similarly very low. The trend also shows that the conditions are relatively stable. Figure 6-9

Pavement Condition

International Roughness Index (IRI)

- Good (31 - 95)
- Fair (96 - 170)
- Poor (171 - 400)

9 Miles

Data Source: HPMS, 2023.

Figure 6-9 shows that the region overall performs well in maintaining pavements on the state-owned highway system in good or fair condition. Most of the pavements on the state-owned highway system that are in poor condition are isolated short segments. However, traffic volumes on US 30 west of US 41 and between SR 55 and I-65 poses a challenge to INDOT to maintain good or fair pavement condition. Also, portions of US 41 (Calumet Ave), SR 312 in East Chicago, and US 12 in East Chicago show signs of deterioration.

Performance Measure #4: Annual number of communities funded and regional funding total of Community Crossings Matching Grant Program (CCMGP) funds

The NWI 2050+ Roads Chapter establishes this performance measure because it is an indication of how much infrastructure condition improvement funding flows from the state into communities in Northwest Indiana and is easily trackable. It is not an outcome-based performance measure because it does not measure the outcome of the final results of the projects funded with CCMGP funds but is rather a capacity-based measure of (one key source of) the financial capacity of communities to improve their infrastructure condition. CCMGP funds are eligible to be used on pavement maintenance, resurfacing, and rehabilitation in accordance with a community's asset management plan. Figure 6-10 below shows the number of communities awarded CCMGP funds in the region and the cumulative amount of CCMGP funding for each year from 2016 through 2025.

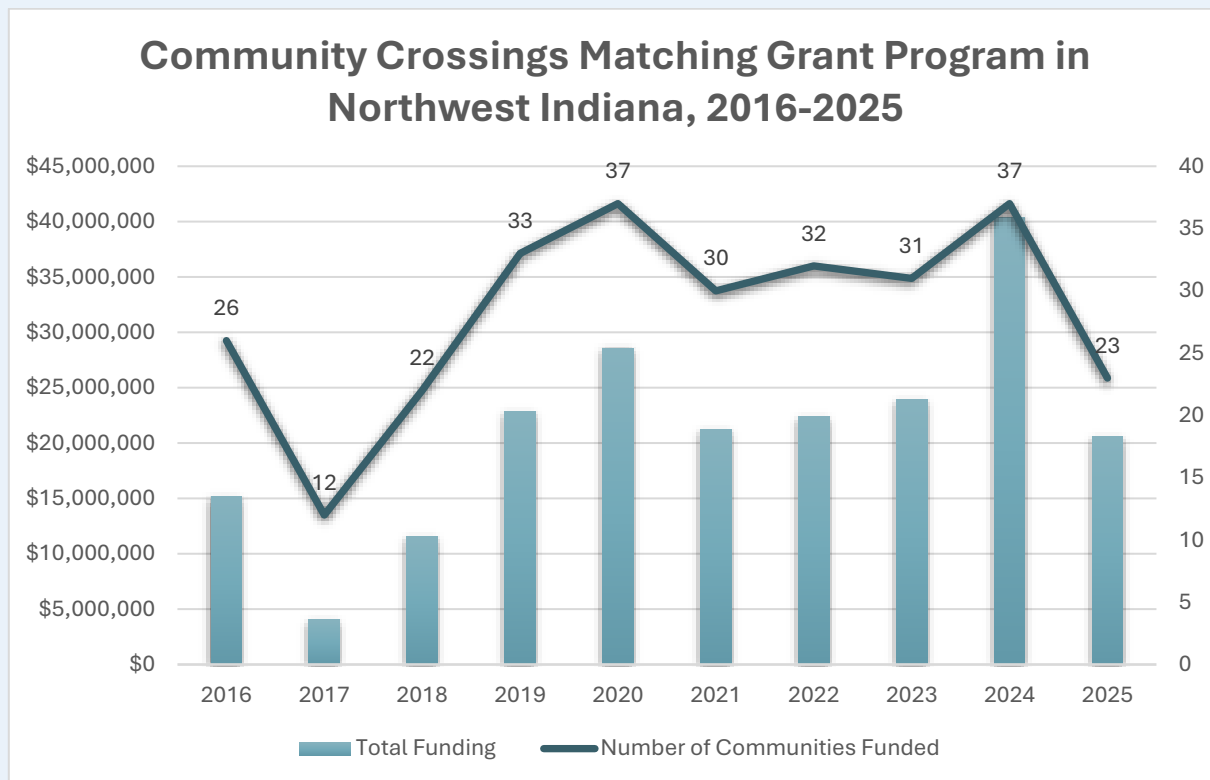


Figure 6-10: Annual Number of NW Indiana Communities Awarded and Total CCMGP Funding, 2016-2025 (Source: INDOT)

Figure 6-10 shows that overall, the CCMGP program has infused a substantial amount of funding to almost every community (out of a possible 44, including 41 municipalities and 3 counties) since the funding program's inception in 2016.

Performance Measure #5: Percentage of National Highway System (NHS) bridges (by area) in good, fair, and poor condition

The performance measure that relates to the second objective of the infrastructure condition goal is the percentage of NHS bridges by bridge deck area in good, fair, and poor condition. Bridges are critically important links in the roadway network that allow road users to traverse various obstacles and are often the most expensive assets to construct and maintain. This is also a federally required performance

measure, with NIRPC supporting INDOT’s statewide targets. Figure 6-11 below shows the NHS bridge conditions in Northwest Indiana in 2019 and 2024.

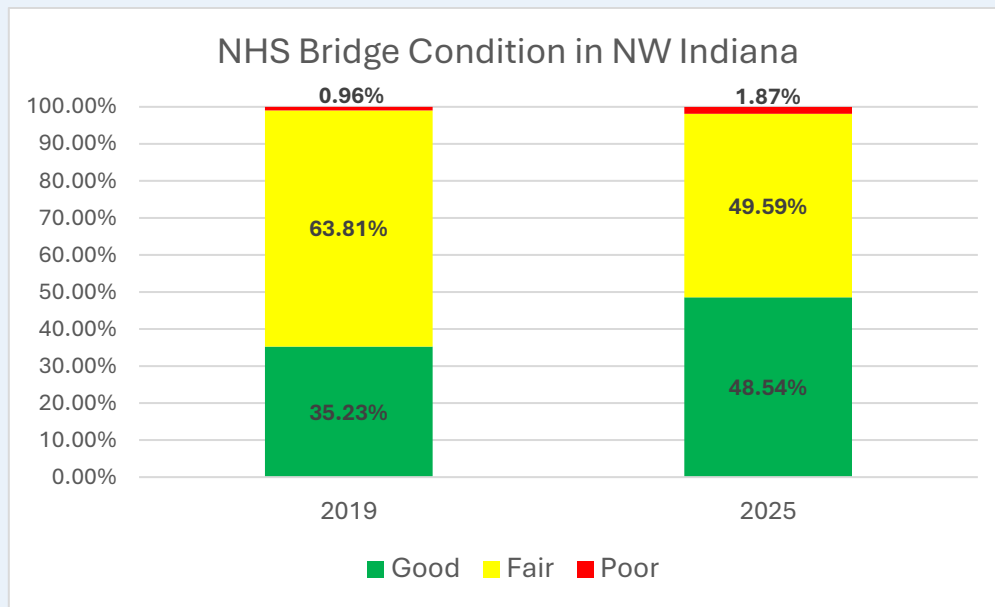


Figure 6-11: NHS Bridge Condition in Northwest Indiana by Percentage of Deck Area (Source: NBI)

Figure 6-11 demonstrates good overall progress in maintaining NHS bridges in Northwest Indiana, with the percentage of NHS bridge deck area in good condition increasing from 35.23% to 48.54% between 2019 and 2025. However, the NHS bridge deck area in poor condition also increased slightly from 0.96% in 2019 to 1.87% in 2025. Figure 6-12 below shows the statewide NHS bridge conditions in Indiana.

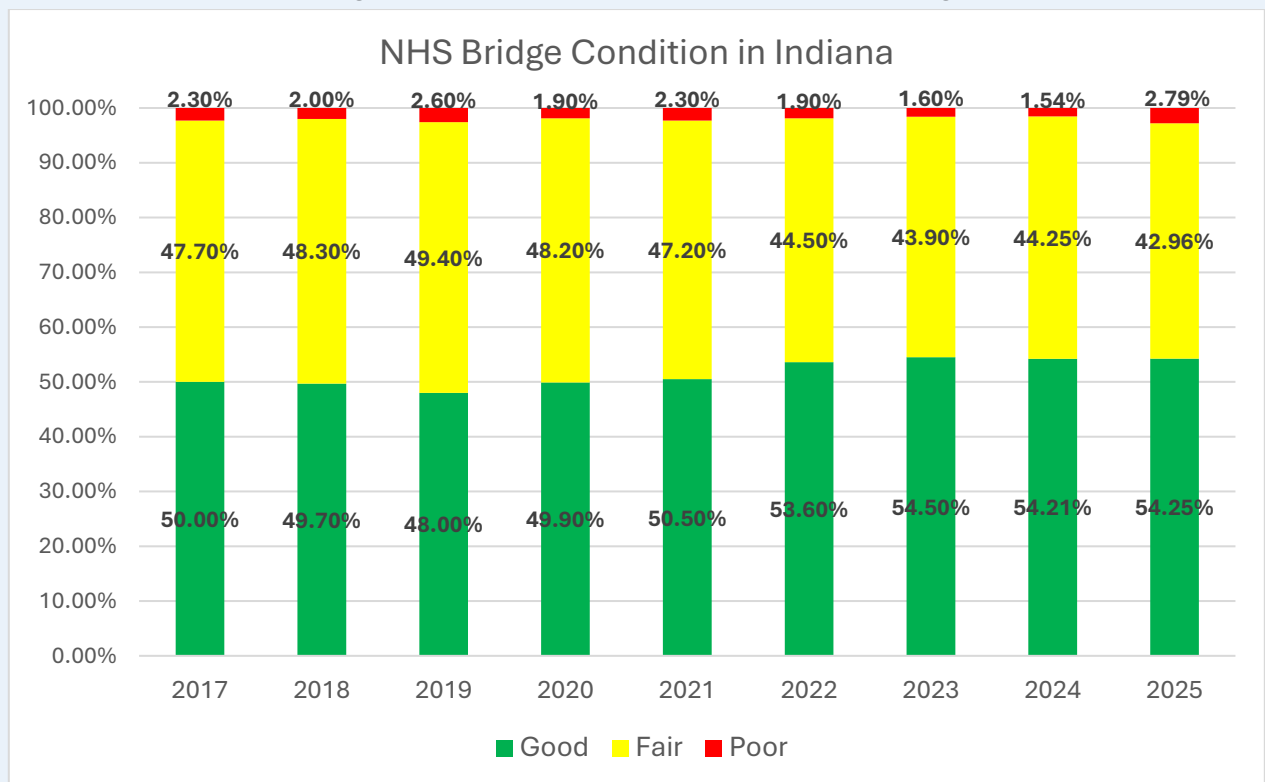


Figure 6-12: NHS Bridge Condition in Indiana by Percentage of Deck Area (Source: NBI)

Figure 6-12 shows that statewide, INDOT and other NHS bridge owners made slightly more progress than in Northwest Indiana reducing the percentage of poor NHS bridge area, but they made more progress in Northwest Indiana increasing the percentage of good NHS bridge area than statewide. In 2019, NHS bridge area in Northwest Indiana was significantly less good than statewide (35.23% vs. 48.00%) but also less poor (0.96% vs. 2.60%). By 2025, NHS bridge conditions in Northwest Indiana were more similar to statewide NHS bridge conditions but still underperformed the statewide NHS bridges in good condition while overperforming NHS bridges in poor condition. Figure 6-13 below maps bridge conditions for bridges on all public roads in Northwest Indiana in 2025, and Figure 6-14 below maps NHS bridge conditions in Northwest Indiana in 2025.

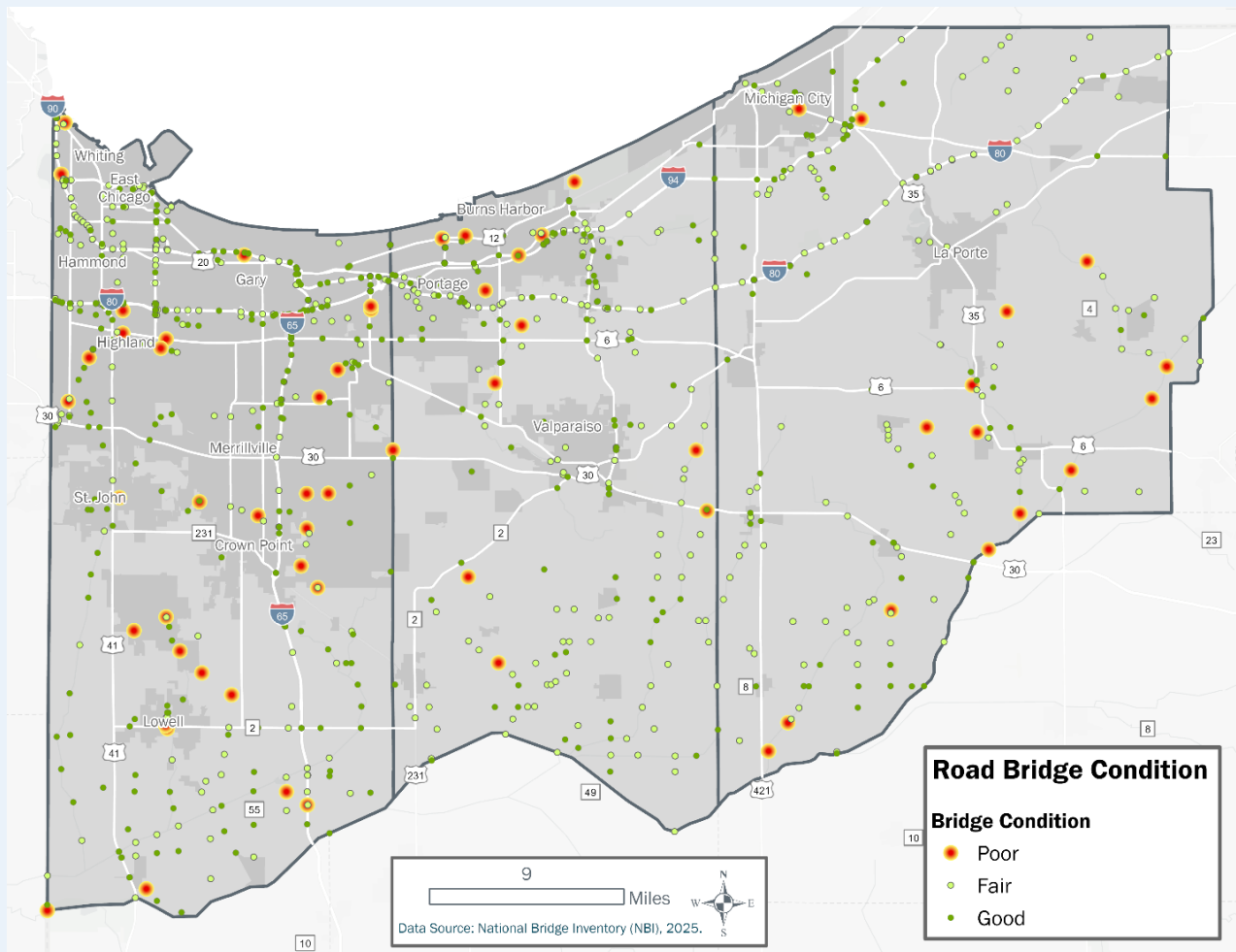


Figure 6-13: Road Bridge Condition for all Bridges, 2025 (Source: NBI)

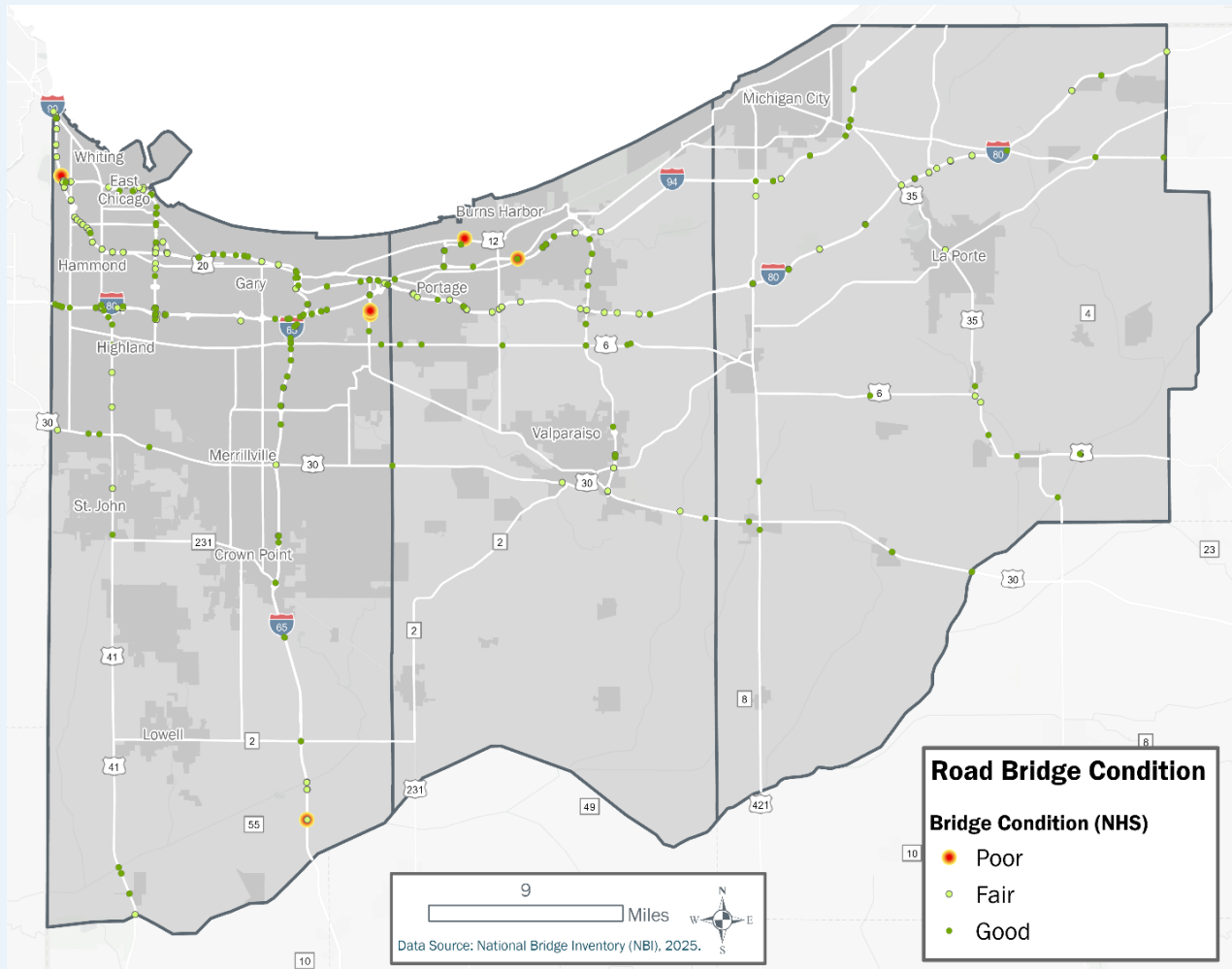


Figure 6-14: Road Bridge Condition for NHS Bridges, 2025 (Source: NBI)

While Figure 6-13 shows many bridges in poor condition in the region, Figure 6-14 shows only seven bridges on the NHS in poor condition as of the 2025 National Bridge Inventory. Most of the bridges on the INDOT-owned Interstate Highways (I-80/94 and I-65) are in good condition. Over half of the bridges on the Indiana Toll Road (I-90 and I-80/90) are in fair condition, meaning that they are at risk of falling into poor condition without rehabilitation.

ROADS GOAL #3: MOBILITY

The *NWI 2050+* Roads Chapter includes one objective and four performance measures related to the mobility goal. The objective states that Northwest Indiana residents and freight carriers can expect to travel at reliable and safe speeds on the region's roadway network. The corresponding performance measures are: percentage of person miles traveled on the Interstates that are reliable, percentage of person miles traveled on the non-Interstate National Highway System (NHS) that are reliable, peak hours of excessive delay per capita, and mean speed on the National Highway System (NHS).

Performance Measure #4: Percentage of Person Miles Traveled on the Interstates that are Reliable

This is a federally required performance measure that tracks how reliable Interstate Highway users can expect travel times to be. Travel time data on the Interstate Highway segments are collected using the National Performance Measure Research Data Set (NPMRDS) for four time periods: 1) weekdays from 6 AM – 10 AM, 2) weekdays from 10 AM – 4 PM, 3) weekdays from 4 PM – 8 PM, and 4) weekend days from 6 AM – 8 PM. A Level of Travel Time Reliability (LOTTTR) metric is calculated for each Interstate Highway segment in each of these time periods by dividing the 80th percentile travel time by the 50th percentile travel time. If the resulting LOTTR calculation is greater than or equal to 1.50 for any of the time periods, the segment is considered unreliable for the purposes of the performance measure calculation. The performance measure is then calculated by dividing the person miles traveled on the reliable Interstate Highway segments by the person miles traveled on the Interstate Highway System for all segments and reported as a percentage. Figure 6-15 below shows the trend in the percentage of person miles traveled on the Interstates that is reliable for both the Northwest Indiana region and the State of Indiana.

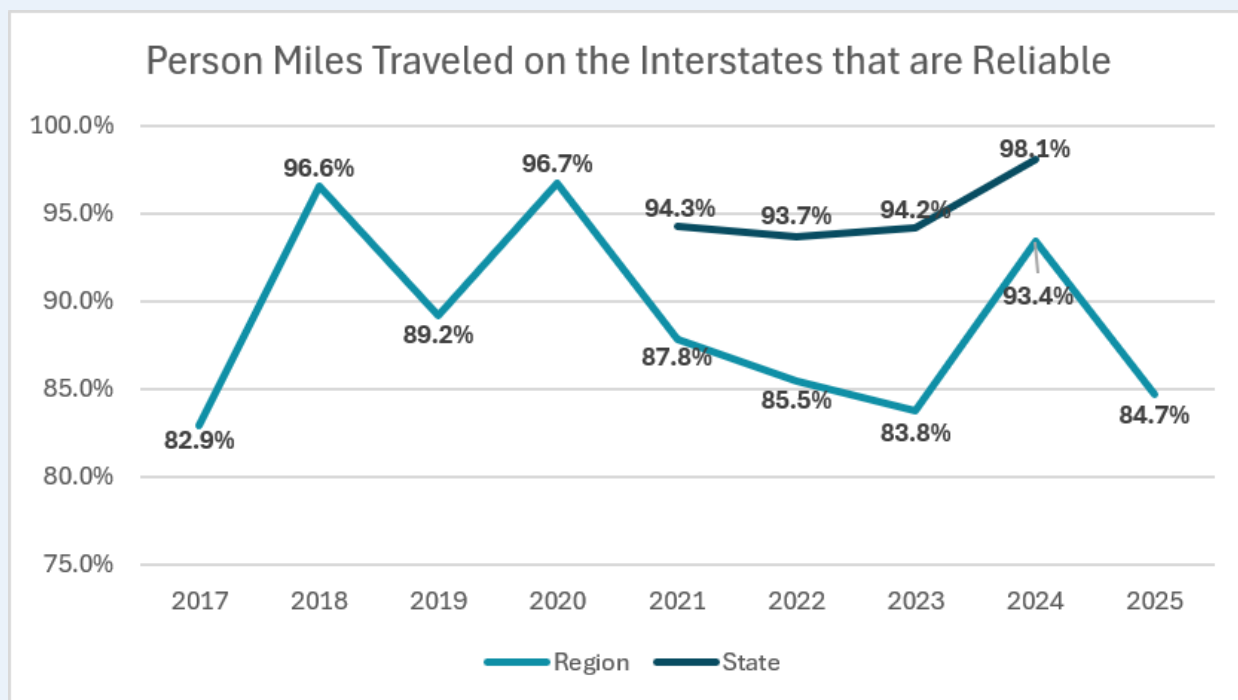


Figure 6-15: Percentage of Person Miles Traveled on the Interstates that is Reliable in the Region and State (Source: NPMRDS)

Figure 6-15 shows that for the years 2021 through 2024 where data is available for both the region and state, the percentage of persons miles traveled on the Interstates in Northwest Indiana is lower than it is statewide. This means that motorists can generally expect travel times to be less reliable on the region's Interstate Highways than statewide. Figure 6-15 also shows that the percentage of person miles traveled on the Interstates in Northwest Indiana has remained relatively stable over time, with periodic increases that likely correspond to years with increased highway construction activity.

Performance Measure #5: Percentage of Person Miles Traveled on the non-Interstate NHS that are Reliable

This is another federally required performance measure that tracks how reliable non-Interstate National Highway System (NHS) users can expect travel times to be. Like the previous performance measure, travel time data are collected from the NPMRDS during the same four time periods, except for non-Interstate NHS segments instead of Interstate Highway segments. The LOTTR metric and performance measure calculations use the same methodology for the non-Interstate NHS segments as for the Interstate segments. Figure 6-15 below shows the trend in the percentage of person miles traveled on the non-Interstate NHS that is reliable for both the Northwest Indiana region and the State of Indiana.

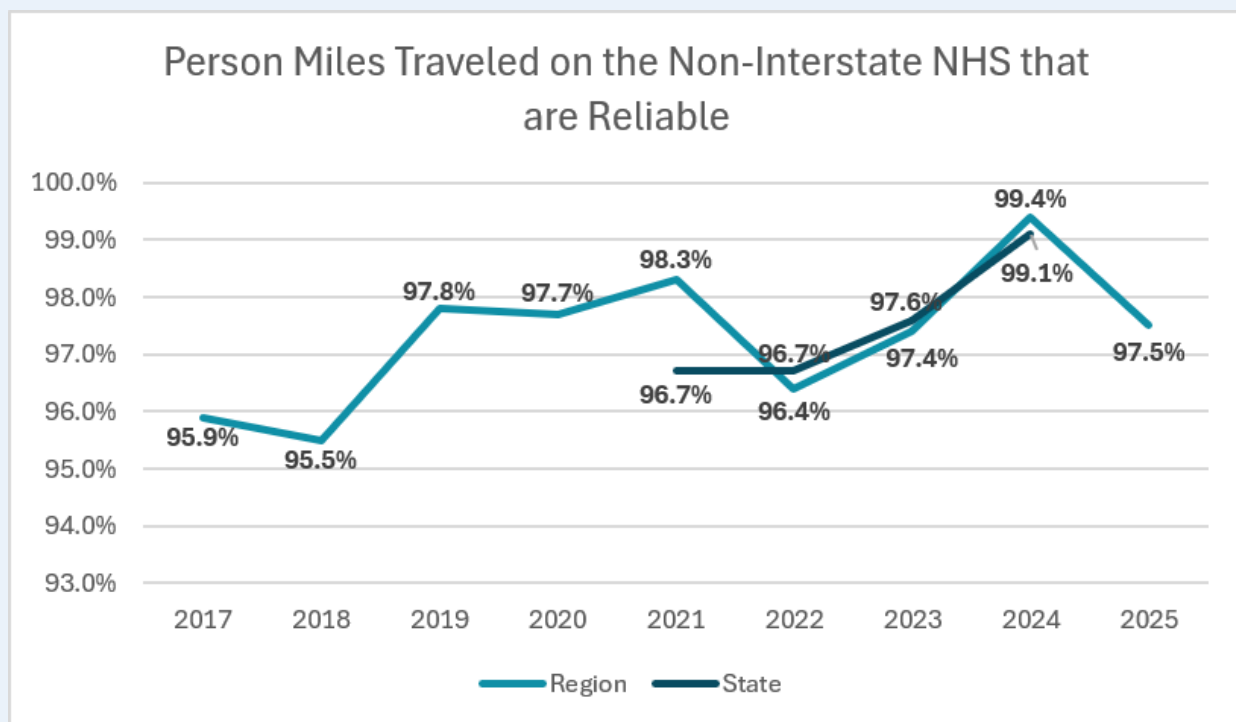


Figure 6-16: Percentage of Person-Miles Traveled on the non-Interstate NHS that is Reliable in the Region and State (Source: NPMRDS)

Figure 6-16 shows that travelers can expect reliable travel times on the vast majority of non-Interstate NHS segments in both the region and state. For the years where data are available for both the region and state between 2021 and 2024, the percentage of person-miles traveled on the non-Interstate NHS was similar in both Northwest Indiana and the State of Indiana. The region outperformed the state in 2021 and 2024, while the state outperformed the region in 2022 and 2023. Figure 6-16 also shows a slight increasing trend in reliability on the non-Interstate NHS, indicating that between 2017 and 2025,

travelers could expect slightly more travel time reliability over time, perhaps attributable to various intersection improvements.

Performance Measure #6: Peak Hours of Excessive Delay (PHED) per Capita

This federally required performance measure tracks the amount of time motorists typically spend in excessive levels of congestion on the National Highway System (NHS) within the entire census-designated Chicago, IL-IN Urban Area (UA). NIRPC, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), INDOT, and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) all mutually coordinate on tracking and setting targets for this performance measure. Like the previous two performance measures, the data for this performance measure is derived from the NPMRDS. Unlike the previous two performance measures, only two time periods are needed: weekdays between 6 AM and 10 AM, and weekdays between 4 PM and 8 PM. The threshold of excessive delay is defined by any 15-minute period within these time periods on an NHS segment where the segment's speed is lower than the lesser of 60 percent of the posted speed limit or 20 miles per hour. The PHED per capita performance measure is then calculated by adding up all the excessive travel times on all the NHS segments within the Chicago UA over the course of an entire year and dividing by the census population of the UA. Figure 6-17 below shows the trend in PHED per capita between 2017 and 2025 on NHS segments within the Chicago UA.

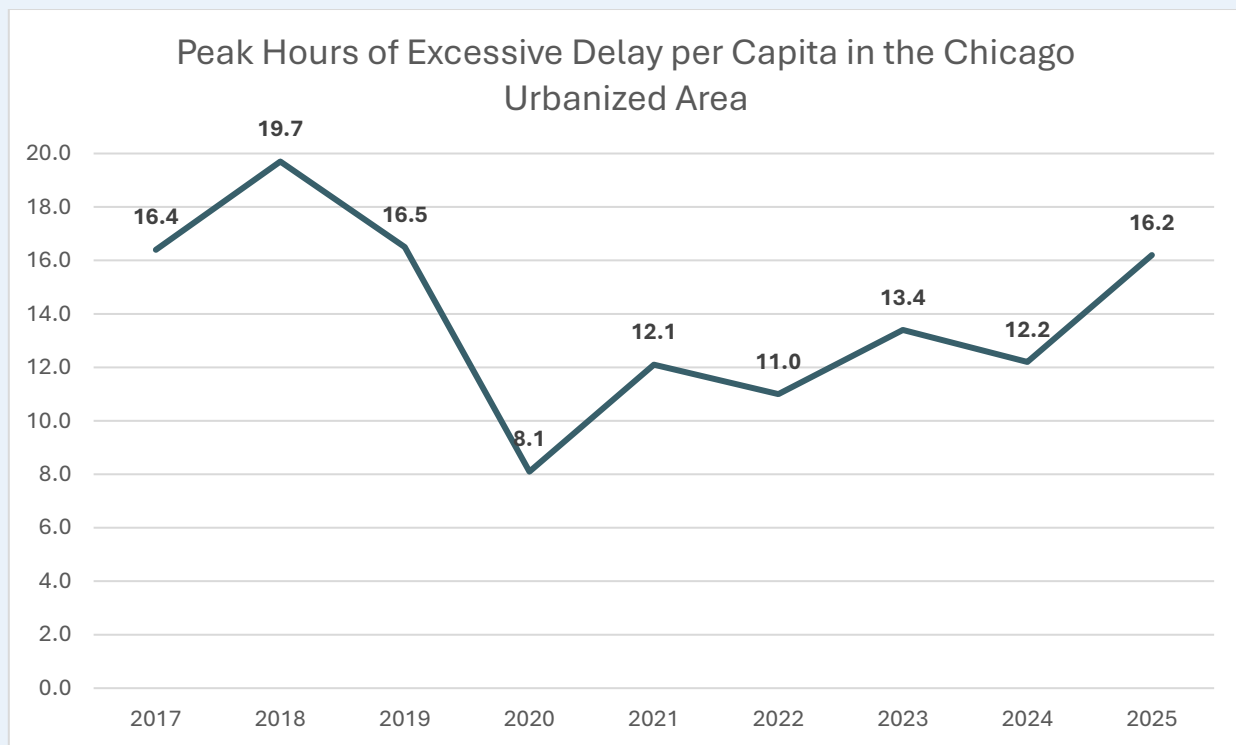


Figure 6-17: Peak Hours of Excessive Delay (PHED) per Capita on the NHS in the Chicago, IL-IN UA, 2017-2025

Figure 6-17 shows that PHED fell sharply during the pandemic and has since steadily rebounded. The most recent figure of 16.2 hours of PHED in 2025 is still slightly lower than during the pre-pandemic levels of 19.7 hours reached in 2018, but if trends continue to increase, it is possible that PHED will reach or exceed pre-pandemic levels. The majority of the NHS segments that contribute to PHED in the Chicago UA are in Illinois, but NIRPC does not measure PHED in only the Indiana portion of the UA.

Performance Measure #7: Mean speed on the National Highway System (NHS)

Measuring mean speeds on the NHS indicates how efficiently residents, workers, and visitors in Northwest Indiana can move on the region's major highways and arterials. The Roads Chapter recommends measuring mean speeds only on the NHS, rather than across all roads, because the data source used to derive the mean speeds, the National Performance Measure Research Data Set (NPMRDS), covers only the NHS. Moreover, higher speeds are not always desirable from a planning perspective; indeed, lower speeds in denser urban environments are preferable for safety and livability, but NHS facilities are designed to move traffic beyond the local level. Figure 6-18 below shows the mean speeds on the NHS in the region in 2025.

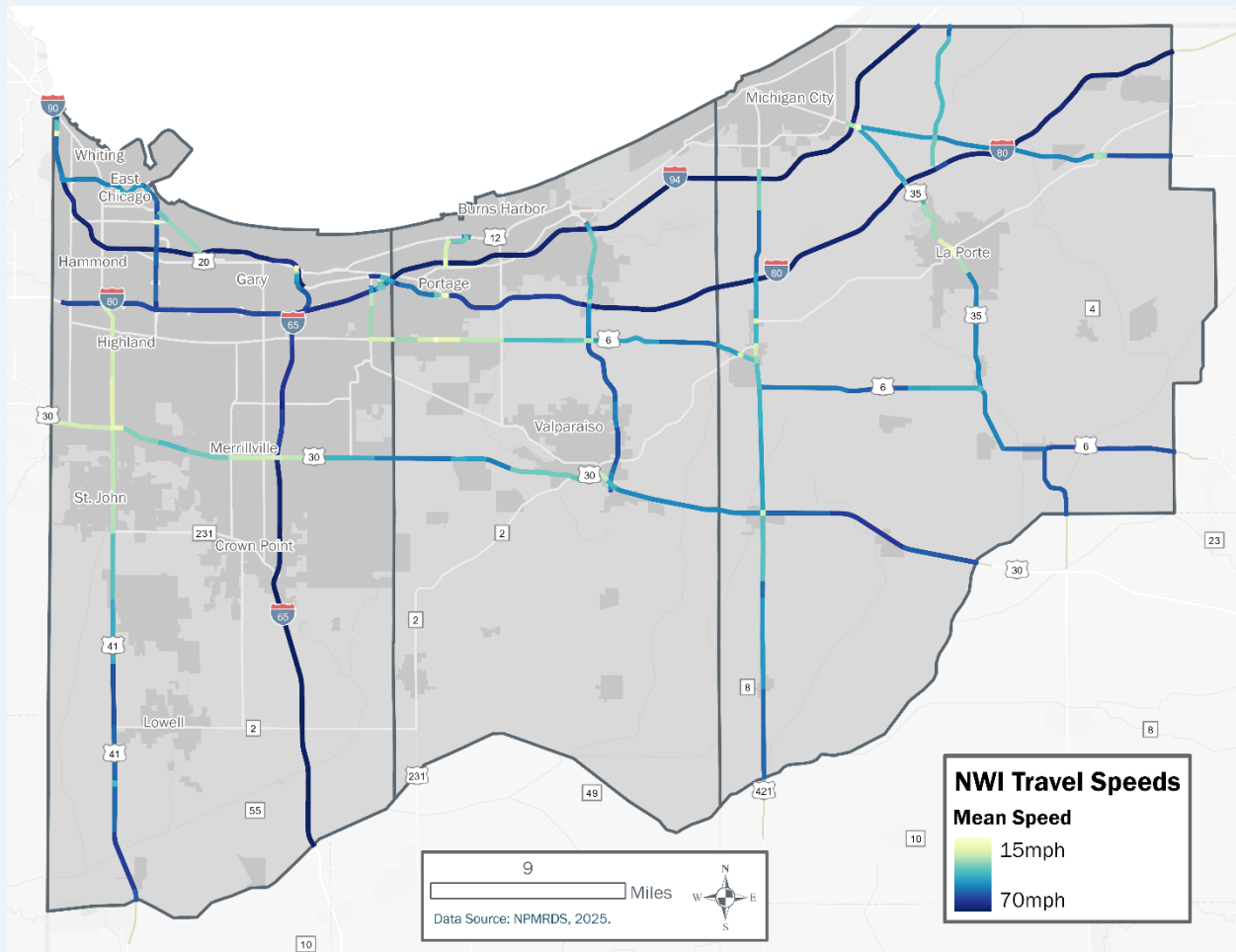


Figure 6-18: Mean Speeds on the NHS in Northwest Indiana, 2025 (Source: NPMRDS)

Figure 6-18 shows that mean speeds are high on most NHS segments. On the Interstates, where the speed limit is 70 miles per hour in most areas, traffic typically meets or exceeds this speed. However, the map also shows pockets of slower travel speeds, such as US 30 in western Lake County, US 41 north of US 30, US 6 in western Porter County, and US 35 through downtown La Porte, where mean speeds are low. This is likely due to congestion caused by high traffic volumes and a high density of intersections and driveway access points in these locations.

ROADS GOAL #4: SAFETY

The *NWI 2050+* Roads Chapter includes one objective and three performance measures related to safety. The objective states that leaders seek to reduce crashes and injuries and eliminate fatalities on the region's roadways. Three performance measures follow from this objective: the 5-year moving annual average of all crashes in the region, the 5-year moving annual average of injury crashes in the region, and the 5-year moving annual average of fatal crashes in the region.

Performance Measure #8: 5-year moving annual average of all crashes in the region

Measuring the number and location of all crashes in the region is critical to assessing where planners and engineers can make improvements on the roadway network. Figure 6-19 below shows the trend in number of total crashes in the region between 2020 and 2024.

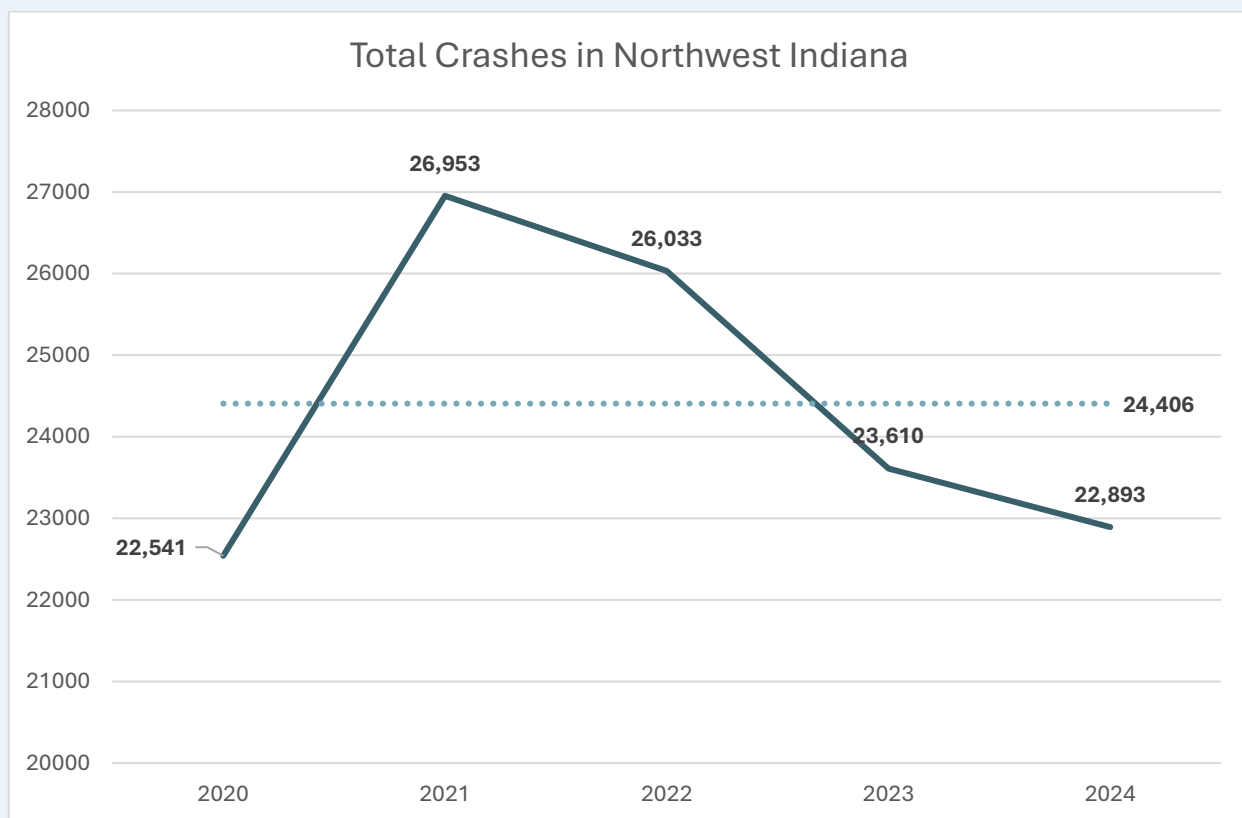


Figure 6-19: Trend in Total Crashes in the Region with 5-year Average, 2020-2024 (Source: ARIES)

Figure 6-19 shows that crashes increased sharply between 2020 and 2021, then decreased steadily between 2021 and 2024 while still remaining above 2020 levels. In total, there were 122,030 crashes over the 5-year period, averaging 24,406 per year. Figure 6-19 below maps concentrated areas where crashes occurred on the region's roadway network between 2020 and 2024, a 5-year period adequate for determining patterns.

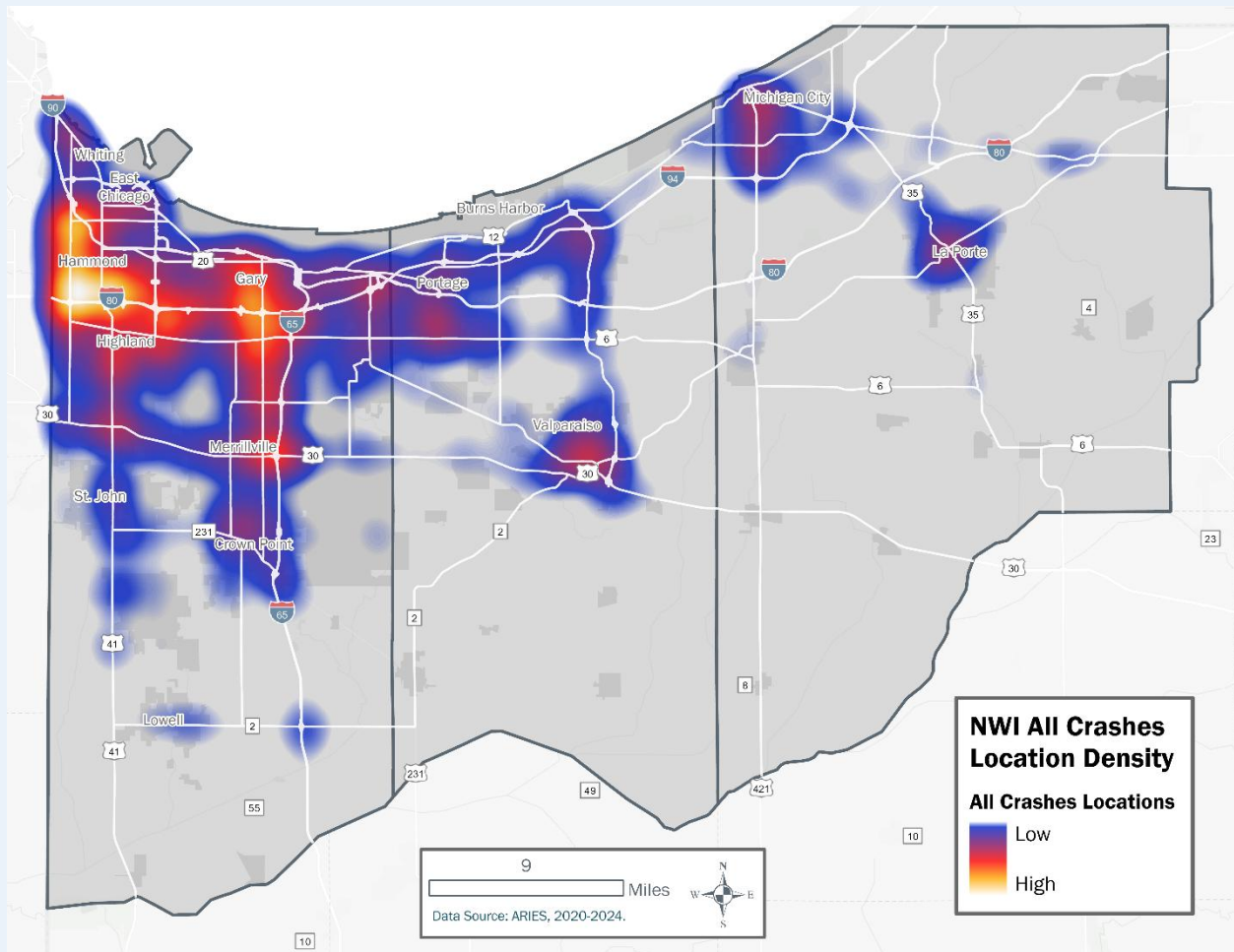


Figure 6-20: Heatmap of All Crashes in the Region, 2020-2024 (Source: ARIES Crash Database)

Figure 6-20 shows that crashes are concentrated in areas with the highest traffic volumes and densest road networks. Hammond and Gary stand out for having the highest crash density. Other areas, such as commercial corridors in Merrillville, Schererville, Valparaiso, and Michigan City, also stand out.

Performance Measure #9: 5-year moving annual average of injury crashes in the region

Measuring the number and location of injury crashes in the region is critical to determining which areas of the roadway network should be prioritized for safety improvement projects. Figure 6-21 below shows the trend in the number of injury crashes in the region between 2020 and 2024.

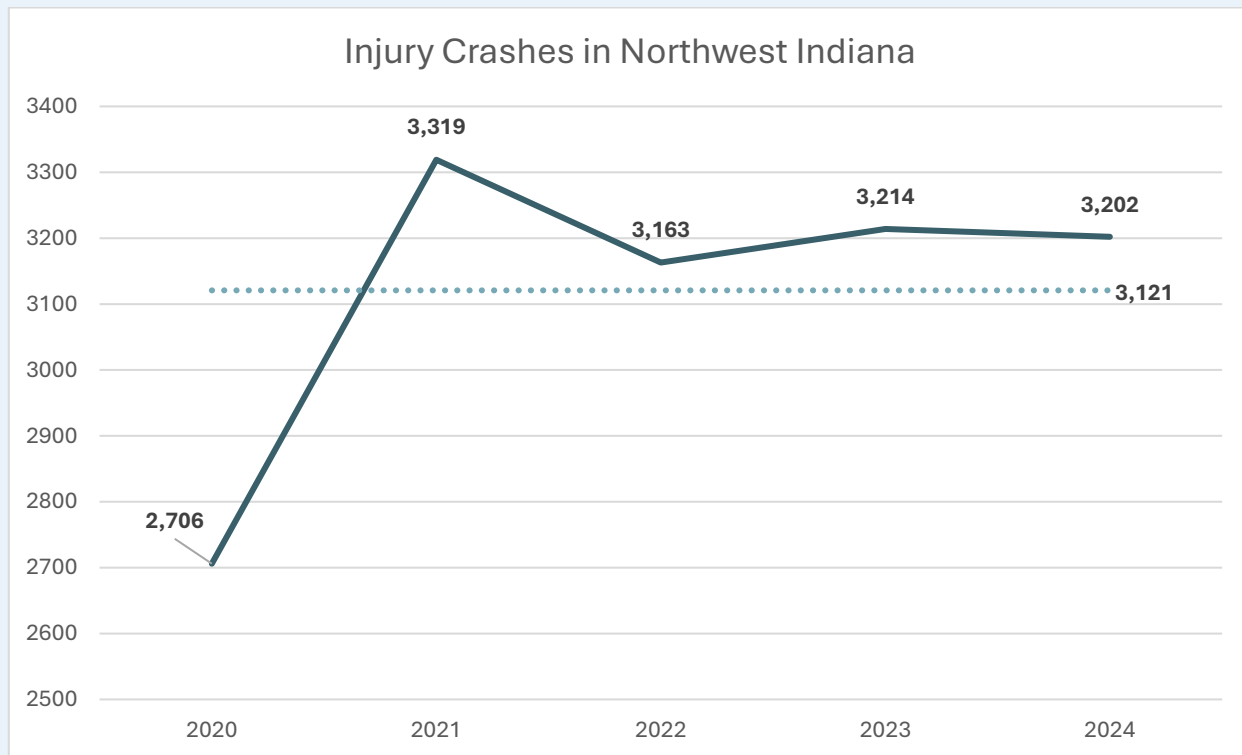


Figure 6-21: Trend in Injury Crashes in the Region with 5-year Average, 2020-2024 (Source: ARIES)

Figure 6-20 shows that injury crashes also increased sharply between 2020 and 2021. However, unlike total crashes, injury crashes only decreased slightly between 2021 and 2022, then remained relatively stable and much higher than 2020 levels between 2022 and 2024. This points to a disturbing trend where total crashes have decreased in recent years while injury crashes have remained high, even slightly increasing, perhaps signifying that high injury risks such as speeding remain. In total, there were 15,604 injury crashes over the 5-year period, averaging 3,120.8 per year. Figure 6-22 below maps concentrated areas where injury crashes occurred on the region's roadway network between 2020 and 2024, a 5-year period adequate for determining patterns.

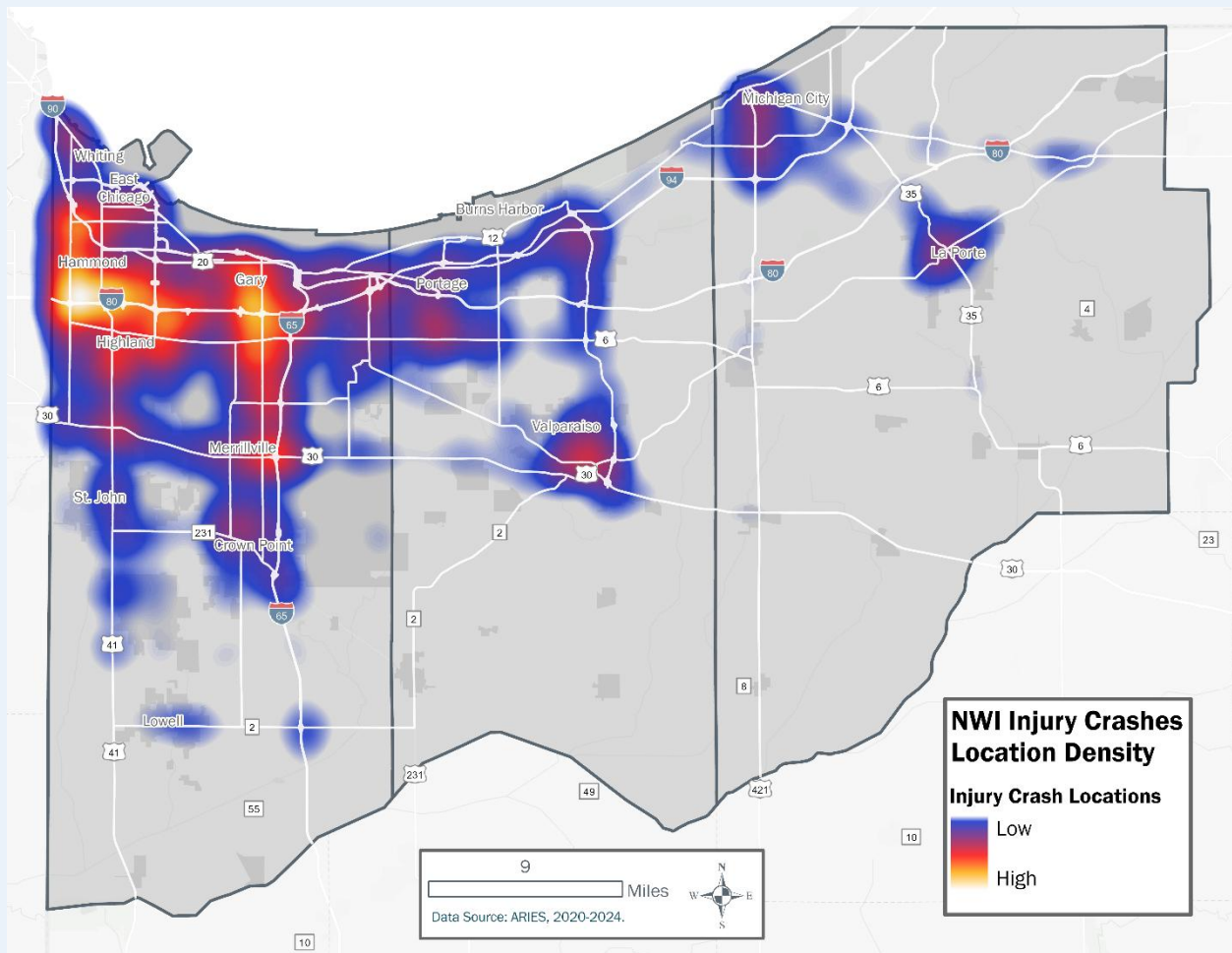


Figure 6-22: Heatmap of Injury Crashes, 2020-2024 (Source: ARIES Crash Database)

Figure 6-22 shows that injury crashes are especially concentrated in areas with the highest traffic volumes and number of intersections. Additionally, a clearer pattern emerges: injury crashes are related to higher speeds. Hammond and Gary, around I-80/94, experienced a high concentration of injury crashes, with Merrillville and Valparaiso also seeing high numbers.

Performance Measure #10: 5-year moving annual average of fatal crashes in the region

Measuring the number of fatal crashes on the region's roads is necessary in order to support the long-term objective of zero fatal crashes. Figure 6-23 below shows the trend in the number of fatal crashes in the region between 2020 and 2024.

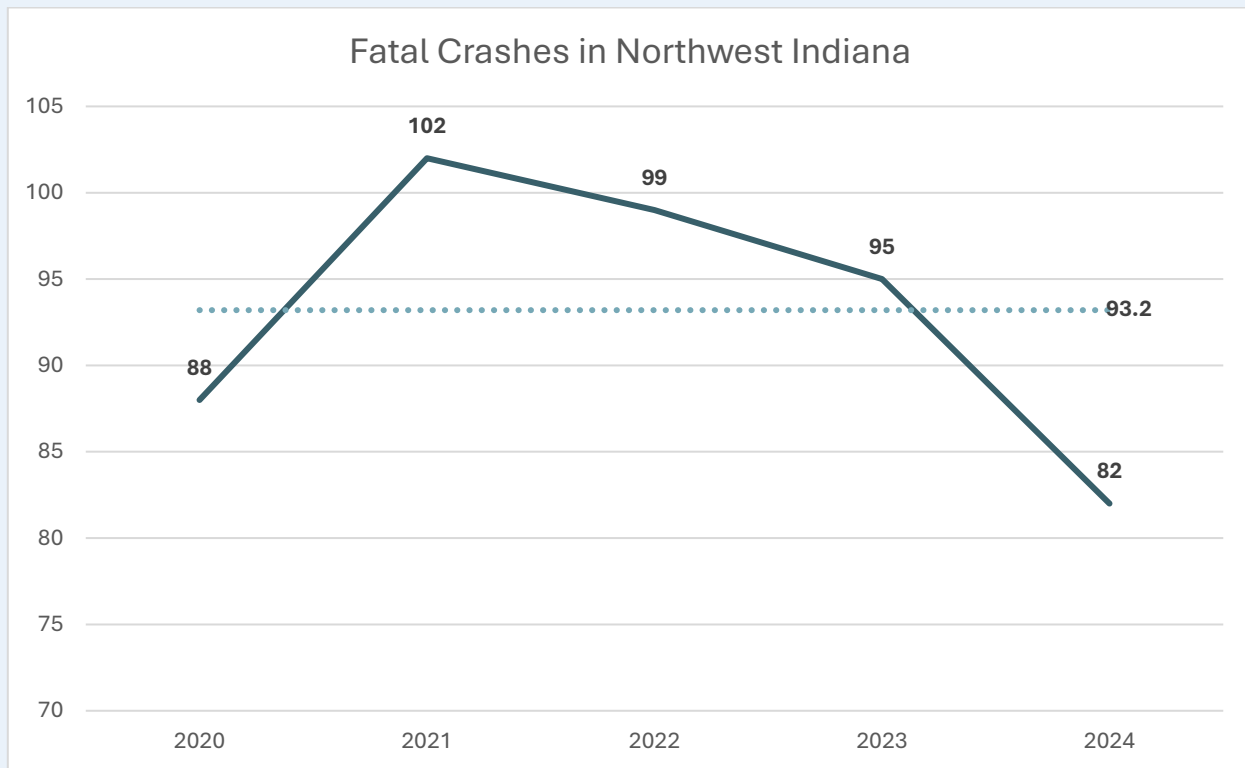


Figure 6-23: Trend in Fatal Crashes in the Region with 5-year Average, 2020-2024 (Source: ARIES)

Figure 6-23 shows that the trend in fatal crashes looks similar to the trend in total crashes in Figure 6-19. Fatal crashes increased significantly between 2020 and 2021, then decreased steadily between 2021 and 2024. By 2024, fatal crashes were below 2020 levels. In total, there were 466 fatal crashes over the 5-year period, averaging 93.2 per year. While it may appear fortunate that this number is significantly smaller than the annual average of injury crashes, the long-term objective is zero fatal crashes. Figure 6-24 below maps concentrated areas where fatal crashes occurred on the region's roadway network between 2020 and 2024, a 5-year period adequate for determining patterns.

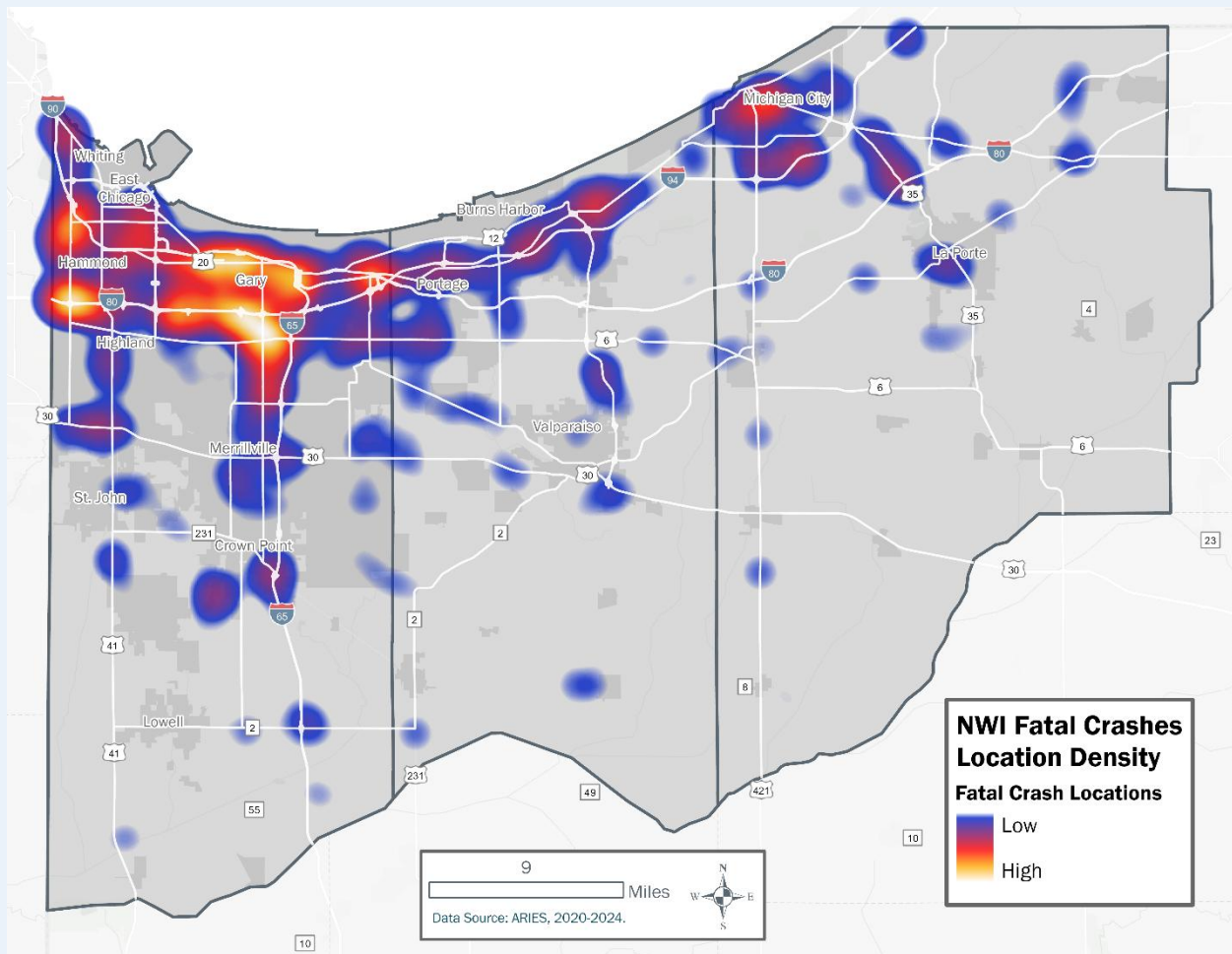


Figure 6-24: Heatmap of Fatal Crashes in the Region, 2020-2024 (Source: ARIES Crash Database)

Figure 6-24 shows that fatal crashes are somewhat more randomly distributed than injury crashes, since several factors usually combine to determine whether a crash results in one or more fatalities. However, there is still a clear pattern showing that fatal crashes are concentrated near the areas with the highest traffic volumes and speeds, especially I-80/94 in Hammond and Gary, and I-65 and I-90 in Gary.

7- TRANSIT

OVERVIEW

This chapter evaluates how public transit supports mobility, access to jobs and services, regional connectivity, and federally required performance reporting in Northwest Indiana. It describes the operators that provide service in the region, summarizes asset management and safety performance measures, identifies populations and employment areas served by transit, and highlights service overlaps, gaps, and opportunities for better coordination.

Public Transit in Northwest Indiana is provided by ten transit operators. Three direct recipients: Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD), Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC), and Michigan City Transit; and seven operators that are subrecipients of NIRPC: East Chicago Transit, North Township Dial-A-Ride, Lake County Community Services, Opportunity Enterprises, Porter County Aging and Community Services, Valparaiso Transit, and City of La Porte TransPorte.

The Transit chapter of *NWI 2050* and *NWI 2050+* address the federally required performance measures. Some of these measures are tracked in the *Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plans* of the direct recipients and the group TAM Plan that NIRPC maintains with the subrecipient transit operators, or the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans (PTASP) of each operator, while others are most appropriately reported in new or updated MTPs. The table below summarizes the measures, targets, and recent results used to assess transit access, asset condition, and safety performance.

Measure	Target	2014	2024
Population of Traditionally Underserved Populations within transit service areas	Increase	76,642	85,060
Number of people within fixed-route transit service areas (1/4 mile for bus, 1/2 mile for commuter bus and commuter rail)	Increase	89,518	132,972

Jobs within transit service areas of fixed-route transit	Increase	28,630	52,374
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The TAM measures show that vehicle replacement remains one of the region’s most significant transit asset challenges. Several measures exceed their targets in recent years, including the share of revenue vehicles beyond useful life and the share of vehicles exceeding useful life without a pending replacement grant. These results suggest that maintaining reliable service will require continued coordination among operators, NIRPC, INDOT, and FTA funding programs to prioritize vehicle replacement and reduce the backlog of aging assets.

Transit Asset Management Performance Measures	Target	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of vehicles submitted for replacement more than one year from the end of their useful life	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of revenue vehicles in operation that have met or exceeded the end of their useful life	<50%	32%	36%	45%	53%	36%
Number of revenue vehicles exceeding their useful life not	<20%	45%	45%	57%	68%	78%

pending replacement in a grant						
Number of non-revenue vehicles in operation that have met or exceeded the end of their useful life	<10%	0%	0%	25%	25%	50%
Annual total cost of total vehicle replacements	10% of annual 5307 apportionment	60%	142%	2%	72%	41%
Number of vehicles submitted for replacement that have a designated “inoperable” system	0	0	0	0	0	3
Number of vehicles that have been funded while not on the Indiana QPA or other state cooperative agreement	0	0	0	0	2	4

The PTASP targets indicate that transit safety performance is generally stable, with fatalities remaining at zero and injury totals remaining low. The sharp decline in reported safety events from the 2023 target level to recent actual values should be explained in the final chapter version, particularly if the change reflects a difference in reporting, service levels, definitions, or actual safety performance. Adding that explanation will help readers understand whether the table reflects a meaningful operational improvement or a change in measurement.

PTASP Targets	Target				Actual		
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2023	2024	2025
Fatalities (Total)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fatalities (Rate)	0/100,000 VRM	0/100,000 VRM	0/100,000 VRM	0/100,000 VRM	0/100,000 VRM	0/100,000 VRM	0/100,000 VRM
Injuries (Total)	2	2	2	2	1	0	1
Injuries (Rate)	1/100,000 VRM	1/100,000 VRM	1/100,000 VRM	1/100,000 VRM	1/100,000 VRM	1/100,000 VRM	1/100,000 VRM
Safety Events (Total)	42	42	42	42	1	0	1
Safety Events (Rate)	12.76	12.76	12.76	12.76			
System Reliability	17,533 VRM / Failure	17,534 VRM / Failure	17,535 VRM / Failure	17,536 VRM / Failure	18,000 VRM / Failure	16,000 VRM / Failure	18,000 VRM / Failure

DIRECT RECIPIENTS OF FTA FUNDS

NICTD:

NICTD operates the South Shore Line, which consists of two inter-city train corridors: the Lakeshore Corridor, which runs between the South Bend Airport in South Bend, IN, and Millennium Station in Chicago, IL; and the Monon Corridor, which runs from Munster/Dyer to Hammond Gateway. The Monon Corridor connects to the Lakeshore Corridor either by transfer or, during peak hours, by continuing to Millennium Station.

GPTC:

GPTC operates a fixed-route bus service along with a complementary paratransit service primarily focused on the City of Gary but also has lines extending into other cities and towns in northern Lake County, notably the Broadway Metro Express (BMX), which follows Broadway to Merrillville and Crown Point.

Michigan City Transit:

Michigan City Transit operates fixed-route service on four local routes and complementary paratransit service within Michigan City and adjacent higher-density residential areas and provides a commuter

bus line to the courthouse in La Porte. Michigan City Transit transitioned to a fare-free operation in early 2026.

SUBRECIPIENTS:

East Chicago Transit:

East Chicago Transit operates fixed-route service within the City of East Chicago, as well as complementary paratransit service. East Chicago Transit has operated for many years as a fare-free service provided to the city. There are two fixed routes that run regularly, Crosstown and West Calumet.

North Township Dial-A-Ride:

The North Township Trustee operates a demand response service in North Township, Lake County. The service area includes East Chicago, Hammond, Highland, Munster, and Whiting, and operates between 7 am and 5 pm on weekdays. Service must be requested at least 24 hours in advance and riders, and their destinations must be within North Township. No fare is charged for this transit service. Much of the area is also served by GPTC and East Chicago Transit fixed route buses.

Lake County Community Services:

Lake County Community Services operates a demand response service for 11 municipalities and 2 townships in Lake County from 8 am to 4:30 pm on weekdays. Scheduling must be 48 hours in advance.

TransPorte:

The City of La Porte operates a demand response service within city limits. This service operates between 6 am and 7 pm on weekdays and 9 am and 2 pm on Saturdays. The “Subscription” recurring service is available, as are scheduled rides requested 24 hours in advance and, when possible, same day.

Opportunity Enterprises:

Opportunity Enterprises is a non-profit organization that serves individuals with developmental disabilities. Among the services OE provides is transportation for Porter County residents to doctors' appointments, therapy sessions, or other community locations. The service is available from 7 am to 5 pm weekdays.

Porter County Aging and Community Services:

Porter County Aging and Community Services provides demand response services to seniors aged 60 and older and those with disabilities. Riders must be Porter County residents and be registered with PCACS. Service hours vary by day, and no service is available on Friday or on weekends.

Valpo Transit:

The City of Valparaiso operates a local deviated fixed-route service, the V-Line, within the city. Since Valpo Transit allows deviations from the fixed route, it is not required to provide complimentary paratransit services. Deviations must be scheduled in advance and are typically allowed only once per one-hour route.

Valpo Transit also operates a commuter bus service, the ChicaGo Dash, which runs from downtown Valparaiso to downtown Chicago. Four buses run this route each morning and return each evening.

Together, these operators form a regional transit network with different service types, eligibility rules, fare policies, and geographic purposes. The following sections move from describing individual providers to evaluating how well the overall network serves transit-dependent populations, employment areas, multimodal trips, and inter-city travel needs.

FARE COLLECTION

Fare collection has evolved over the years for transit agencies. To reduce the potential for theft incidents among bus drivers, most transit agencies began requiring riders to pay exact fares in the early 1970s, removing drivers from handling cash. However, having to carry exact change is a major inconvenience for riders and depresses ridership. To mitigate these conditions, some small agencies, such as East Chicago Transit and North Township Dial-A-Ride, have simply adopted fare-free operations.

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 Authority (CTA), have typically purchased custom apps, which may require riders to set up an account (e.g., Ventra, which CTA 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 that 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 an account to be created.

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.

TRANSIT DEPENDENT POPULATIONS

Certain populations tend to be more reliant on public transit than the general population. Generally, transit dependent populations are included in NIRPC's definition of "traditionally underserved populations", which includes people of racial or ethnic minorities, people with low incomes, individuals with limited English proficiency, those who live in zero car households, veterans, individuals over 65 years of age, and individuals with disabilities.

The number of people within transit service areas who would be considered traditionally underserved increased from 51,702 of 197,644 people in 2014, or 26%, to 65,940 of 156,973 people in 2024, or 42%. This indicates that a larger share of the population near transit is made up of people who may be more likely to depend on transit, even though the total population counted within those service areas declined over the same period.

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While much of Lake and Porter counties, as well as the City of La Porte, have demand-response transit service available, fixed-route transit is generally simpler to understand, easier to use spontaneously, and more visible to potential riders. For this analysis, fixed-route bus access is measured as being within ¼ mile of a bus stop, which is roughly a five-minute walk. Commuter rail and commuter bus access is measured within ½ mile because those services cover longer distances and riders are generally willing to travel farther to reach a station or stop.

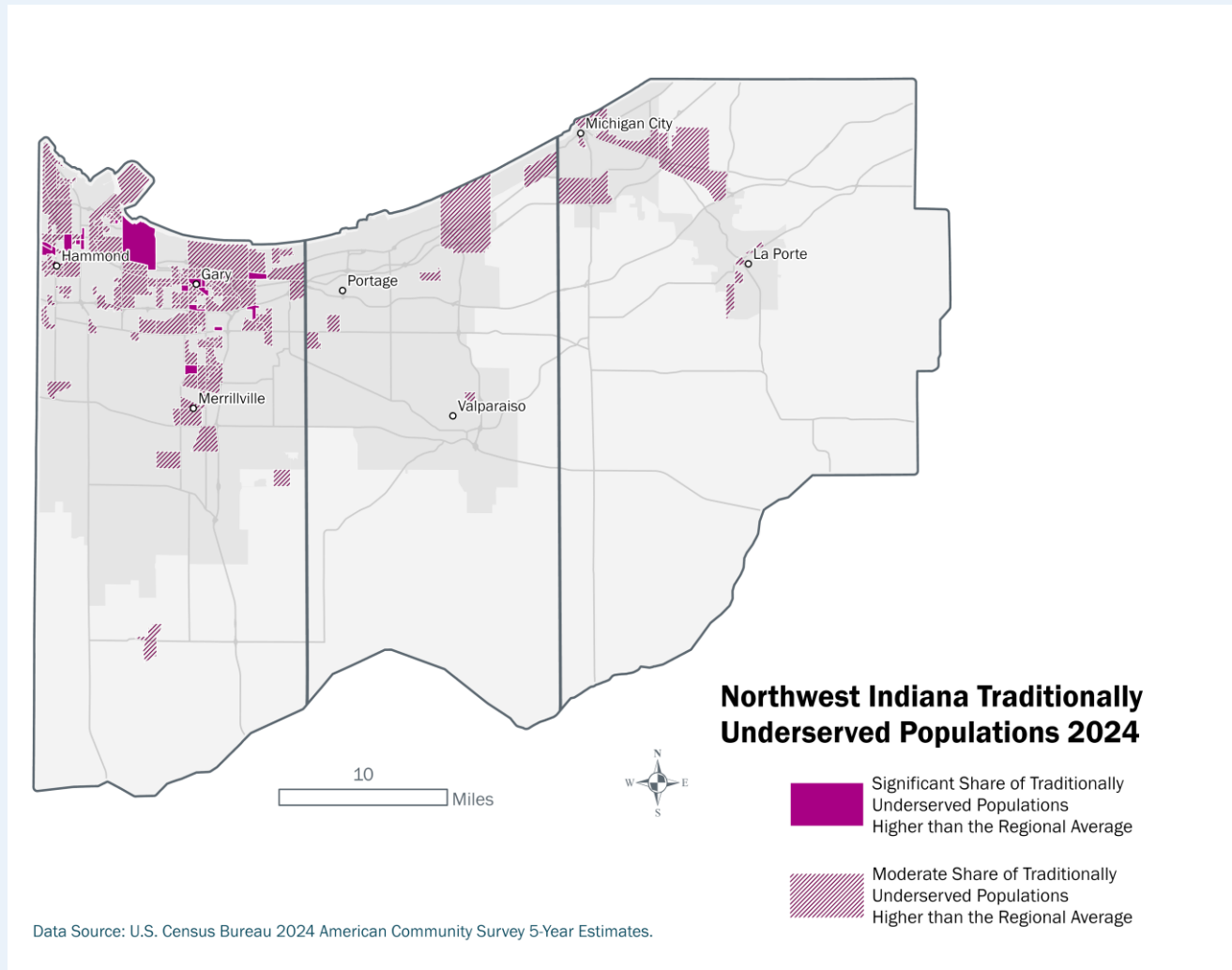


Figure 7-1: Traditionally Underserved Populations in 2024. Moderately above average and significantly above average numbers of traditionally underserved populations in Northwest Indiana

Figure 7-1 shows areas with above average numbers of traditionally underserved populations. The highest concentrations are in areas of Hammond, East Chicago, Gary, and Merrillville along with sections of Michigan City and La Porte

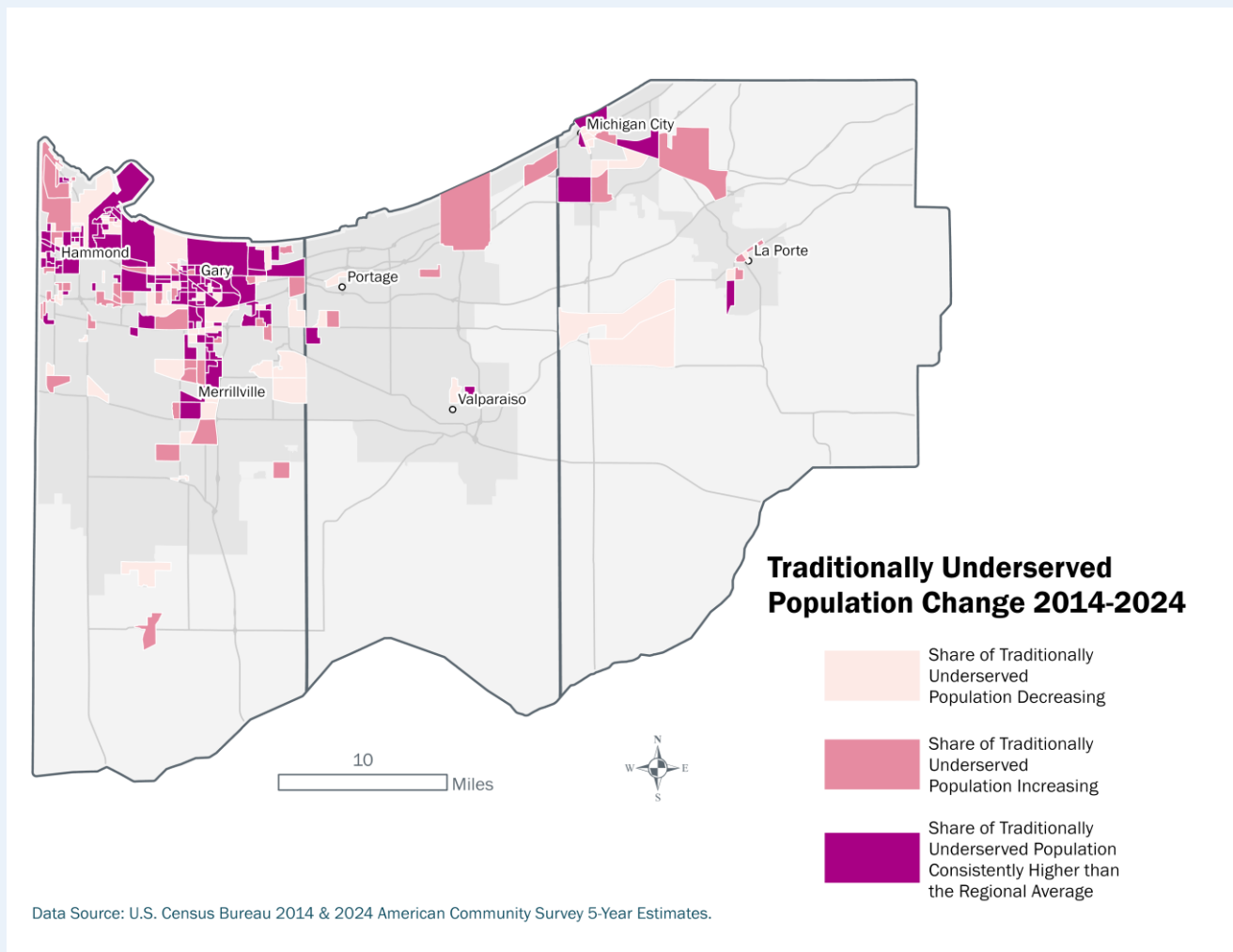


Figure 7-2: Census groups with increasing and decreasing numbers of traditionally underserved populations from 2014 to 2024.

Figure 7-2 shows areas where Traditionally Underserved Populations have increased and decreased in the time from 2014 to 2024. The areas with the highest increases in traditionally underserved populations are generally dense urban areas, though certain suburban areas are also showing growth in the proportion of the population that is traditionally underserved.

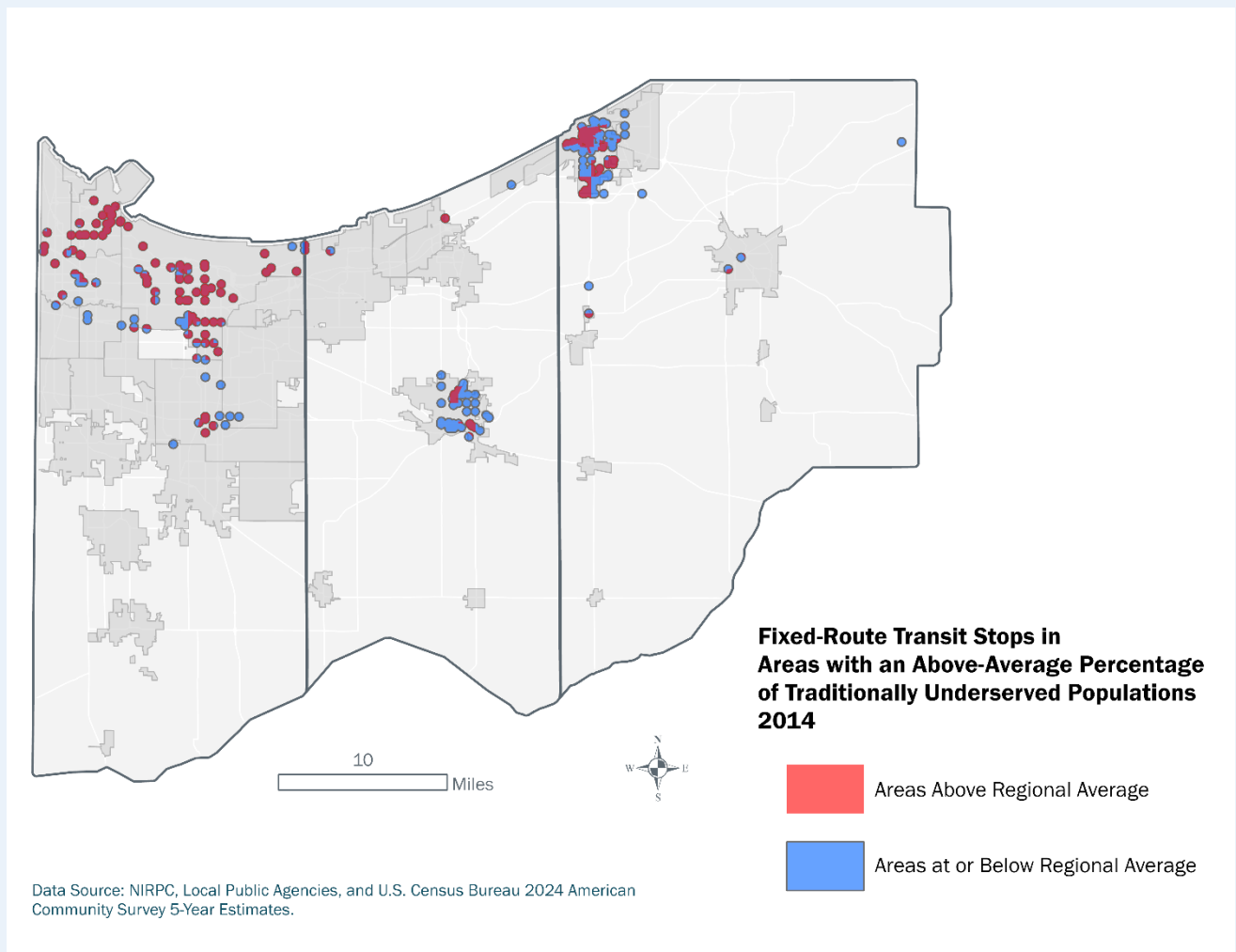


Figure 7-3: 1/4-mile radius around fixed-route transit stops in 2014. Higher than average numbers of traditionally underserved populations shown in red, stops with average or below average numbers of traditionally underserved populations shown in blue.

Figure 7-3 shows fixed-route bus stops and South Shore Line stations, with stop colors indicating whether the surrounding area has an above-average share of traditionally underserved populations. The comparison shows that fixed-route transit access has expanded and that more traditionally underserved populations are near transit stops, driven in part by GPTC service changes and the addition of NICTD's Monon Corridor.

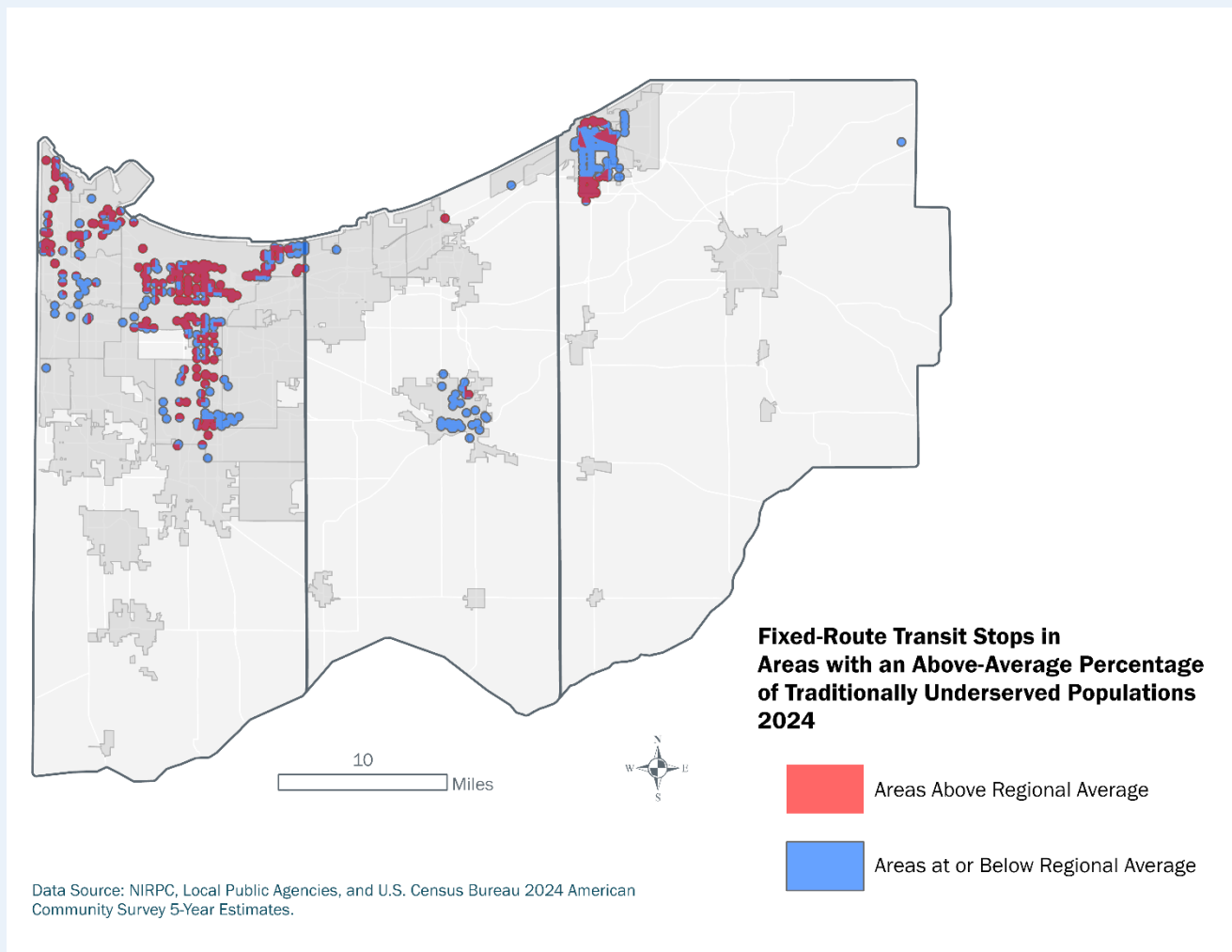


Figure 7-4: Communities served by fixed-route transit in 2024 and traditionally underserved communities served by transit in 2024.

From 2014 to 2024, the number of jobs within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a fixed-route transit stop increased 45.3%, from 28,630 to 52,374, while the total regional workforce decreased 5.4%, from 140,112 to 132,972. This means that employment near transit grew despite an overall decline in regional employment, suggesting that route changes and rail expansion improved the alignment between transit service and job locations. The expansion of GPTC routes and the completion of NICTD's Monon Corridor contributed to this increase by adding service near additional employment areas.

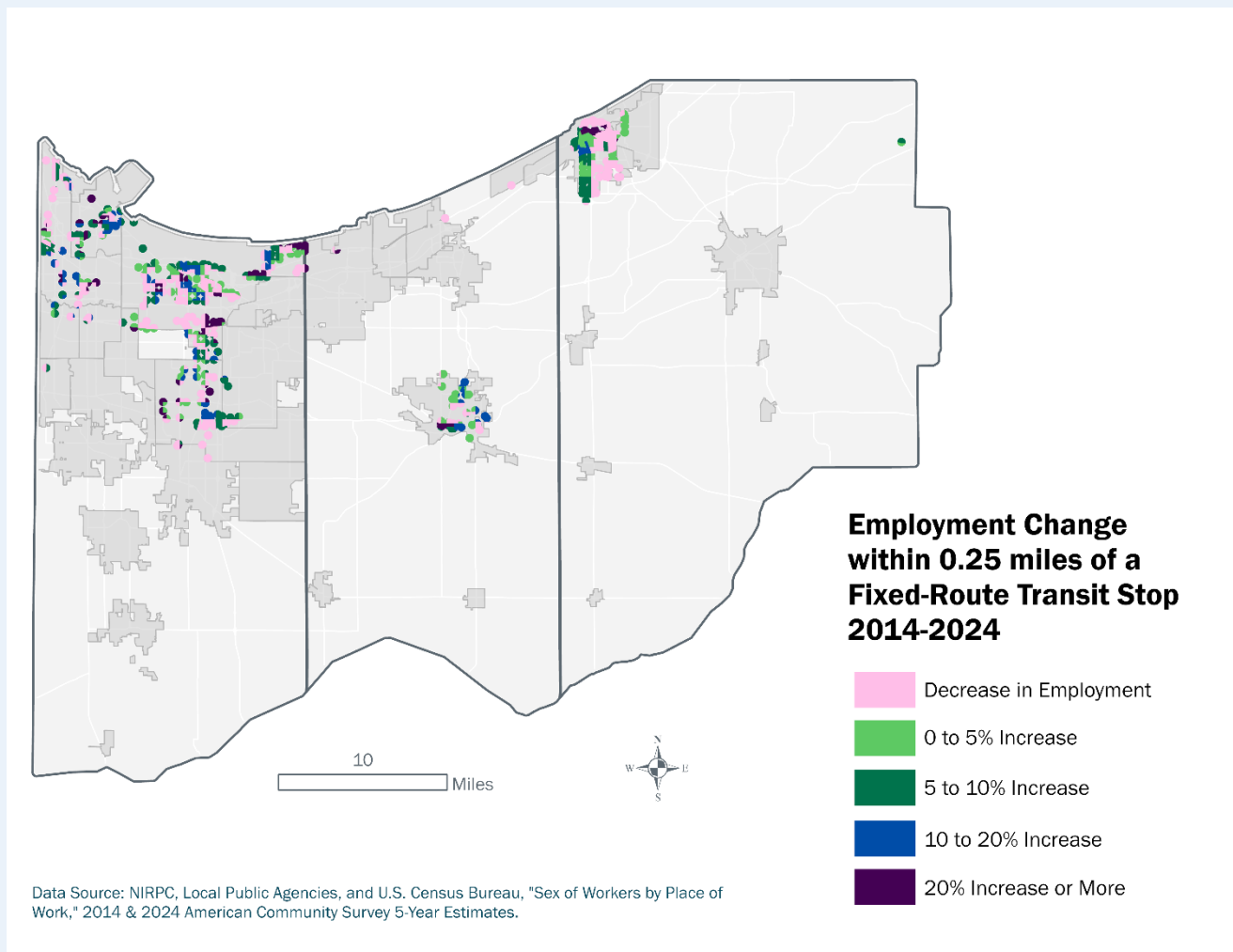


Figure 7-5: Areas near fixed-route transit stops with increases and decreases in employment from 2014 to 2024.

Transit operators service to include the Monon Corridor has expanded access to the employment areas near transit stations by adding service areas along the western portion of Lake County. This increase is important because it connects more workers and job centers to the regional transit network, but it should be understood in the context of service frequency, first- and last-mile connections, and the types of jobs that are reachable by transit.

SERVICE

The service analysis considers how transit coverage, service overlaps, and service gaps affect regional mobility. Because Northwest Indiana's transit network includes commuter rail, commuter bus, fixed-route local bus, demand-response service, and paratransit service, the presence of service in an area does not always mean that all residents can make the same kinds of trips. The distinctions among service type, eligibility, span, frequency, and connections need to be evaluated regularly to determine whether the system meets the regional needs.

INTER-CITY TRANSIT

In addition to the fixed-route, demand response, and commuter transit services described above, Inter-city transit is provided by Flixbus, Greyhound, and Amtrak in Northwest Indiana.

Amtrak has two lines with stops in the region. The Cardinal Route which goes from Chicago to New York, stopping in Dyer while the Wolverine Route goes from Chicago to many cities in Michigan including Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, Detroit, and Pontiac, MI, stopping at the Hammond-Whiting stop. These Amtrak services provide connections to the north and east as well as to Chicago, which has additional routes westward.

Greyhound and its parent company Flixbus operate as separate brands and have stops in Gary, Merrillville, Valparaiso, Michigan City, La Porte, and Rolling Prairie connecting area residents to cities across the country. Greyhound and GPTC have partnered to expand access in the area and to share facilities.

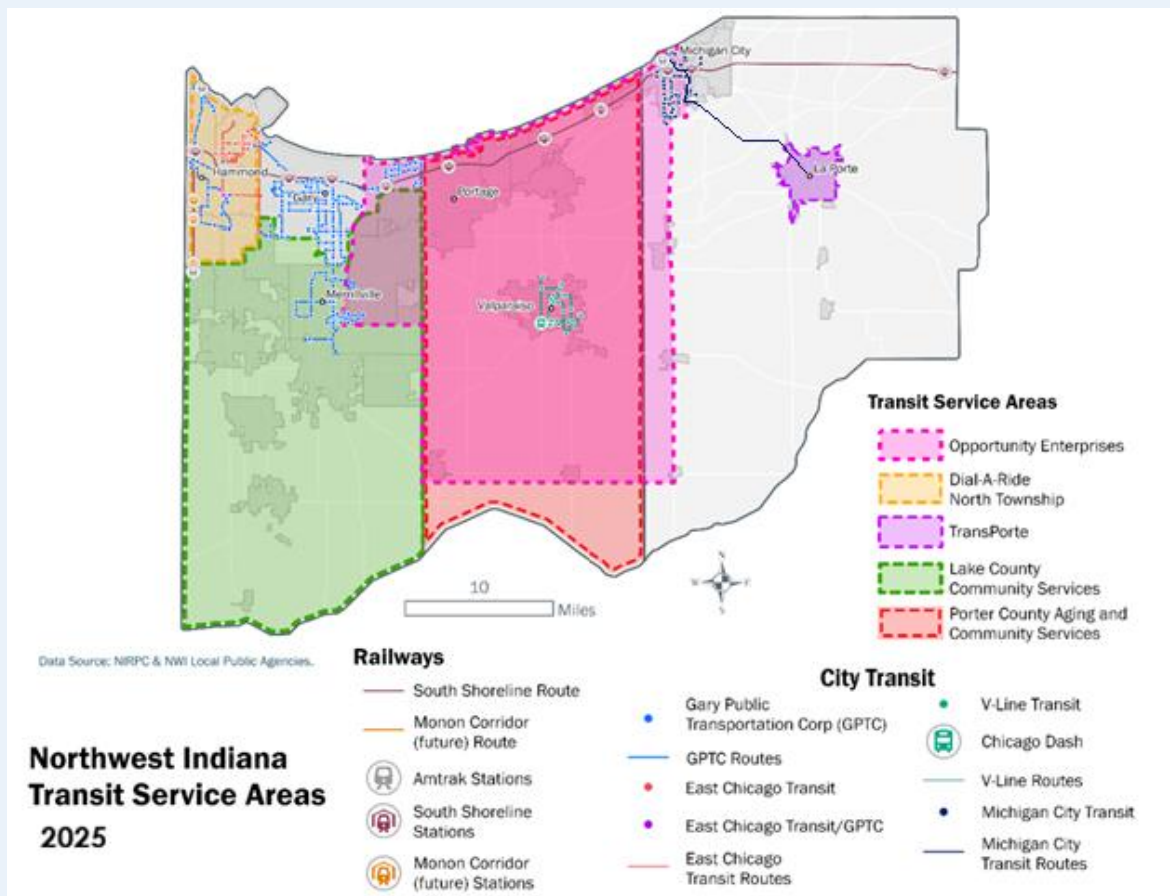


Figure 7-6: Transit service areas in NIRPC region. Demand Response service and Fixed-Route service are shown on the map. Fixed-Route bus operators are required to provide complimentary paratransit service within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of a routes operated, which is not shown on the map.

Service Overlaps

GPTC and ECT both serve portions of East Chicago, though their schedules and fare structures differ.

GPTC and North Township Dial-A-Ride also serve the general public in much of the same area.

Opportunity Enterprises and Porter County Aging and Community Services serve nearly identical geographies but have distinct populations, meaning their geographic overlap is not a service overlap.

Service Gaps

In Lake County, one area with a high transit demand index but without fixed-route bus service is the City of Whiting. The area is served by North Township Dial-A-Ride demand-response but not by fixed-route bus or commuter train service. Areas in La Porte also have high transit demand but are served only by demand-response service (TransPorte) and not by fixed-route service. Additionally, since TransPorte only serves the City of La Porte, there is no way for residents to travel to Michigan City, other parts of La Porte County, or across county lines into other parts of the region.

Service Coverage

Although fixed-route public transit serves only about 15% of the region's land area, that area accounts for roughly three-quarters of the region's residents and jobs. This indicates that fixed-route transit is concentrated in the region's more populated and employment-dense areas, but it also means that lower-density communities and cross-county trips may remain difficult to serve without demand-response, commuter, or inter-city connections.

Attractiveness of Service to Non-Transit Dependent Riders

Public transportation competes with personally owned automobiles, taxis, and ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft. The most competitive services with the automobile in Northwest Indiana are the South Shore Line and the ChicaGo Dash. These services operate fast service from locations in the region to downtown Chicago. This allows riders to forego the substantial cost of parking in downtown Chicago.

Outside of commuter transit services, most transit service in the area is local bus service, either fixed-route or demand-response. While NIRPC maintains a list of the transit operators, with links to their websites, on NIRPC's website, there is no unified platform that provides all the information on the transit service available to Northwest Indiana residents that would help them navigate switching between operators or that would allow them to access rides with a single payment method.

While most fares are kept low, the frequency of bus service is low, thus making transit less competitive against some method of using a privately owned automobile, either one's own, borrowed, getting a ride from a friend or family member, or using Uber/Lyft.

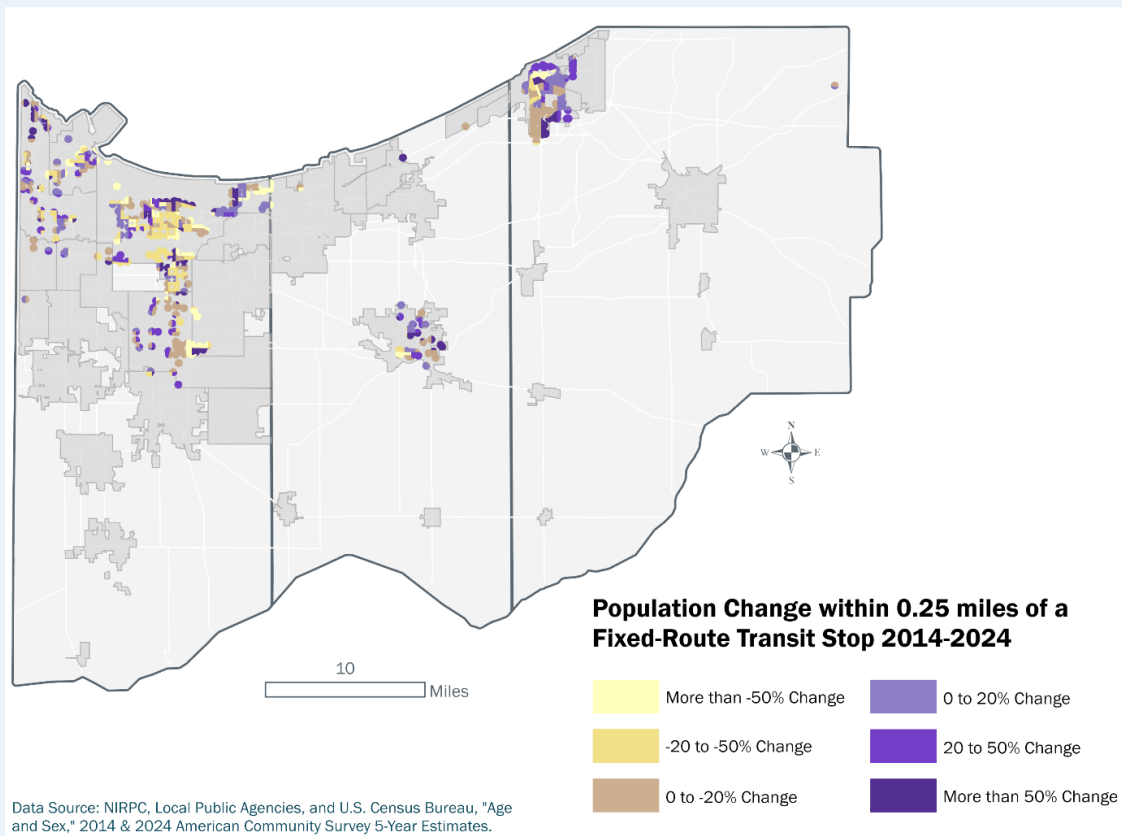
MULTI-MODAL TRANSIT

Fixed-route transit operators accommodate bicycles for multi-modal transit use either by including bicycle racks on the exterior of the vehicle or, in the case of the train, in-car bike racks. These options extend the practical reach of transit beyond the immediate walking distance of a stop or station and are especially important where sidewalk, trail, or local bus connections are limited.

GPTC also sponsors the Cycle219 bikeshare program at locations within its service area, adding another first- and last-mile option for riders who can use bicycles to reach bus stops, rail stations, jobs, schools, or other destinations.

Population Change near Fixed-Route Transit Providers

The population served by fixed-route transit increased both in number and as a share of the regional population, from 89,518 of 680,734 residents, or 12%, in 2014 to 132,972 of 787,114 residents, or 17%, in 2024. Population near transit can grow either because more people live near existing stops or because transit service expands into more populated areas. In Northwest Indiana, the increase appears to reflect both regional population growth and service expansion, especially GPTC route changes and NICTD's Monon Corridor.



*Figure 7-7:
Increase and
decrease in
population
within .25
miles of fixed-
route transit
stops from
2014 to 2025.*

8- NEXT STEPS

The data collected in this Regional Profile and Performance Report will form the basis of the update of NIRPC's Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Portions of this report have already been presented and reviewed with the public, local officials, and other stakeholders at pop-up events across the region, NIRPC committee meetings, and stakeholder working group meetings. NIRPC will continue to present this information over the coming months with the goal of identifying the driving forces behind the data and crafting recommendations for specific actions that NIRPC can take to meet our collective goals.

For more information on the 2027 Metropolitan Transportation Plan update and to learn of additional ways you can participate in the planning process, please visit:

<https://www.in.gov/nirpc/transportation/2050-metropolitan-transportation-plan-2027-update/> .