



# 2019 Annual Report

# 2019 NIRPC Commissioners and Officers

## LAKE COUNTY

Lake County Commissioner	Kyle W. Allen, Sr.
Lake County Council	Charlie Brown
Lake County Surveyor	Bill Emerson, Jr.
<b>Mayor of East Chicago</b>	<b>Anthony Copeland*</b>
<b>Mayor of Gary</b>	<b>Karen Freeman-Wilson*</b>
<b>Mayor of Hammond</b>	<b>Thomas M. McDermott**</b>
Mayor of Hobart	Brian Snedecor
Mayor of Lake Station	Christopher Anderson
Mayor of Whiting	Joseph M. Stahura
Crown Point City Council	Andrew Kyres
Cedar Lake Town Council	Robert Carnahan
Dyer Town Council	Steven Kramer
Griffith Town Council	Rick Ryfa
Highland Clerk-Treasurer	Michael Griffin
Lowell Town Council	Will Farrellbegg
Merrillville Town Council	Richard Hardaway
Munster Clerk-Treasurer	Dave Shafer
New Chicago Town Council	Sharon Szwedlo
St. John Town Council	Gerald Swets
Schererville Town Council	Tom Schmitt
Schneider Town Council	Jack Jeralds
Winfield Town Council	Dave Anderson

## OFFICERS

Chairperson	Diane Noll
Vice-Chairperson	Karen Freeman-Wilson
Treasurer	Justin Kiel
Secretary	George H. Topoll
Immediate Past Chairperson	Geof Benson

## Executive Board Member\*

## PORTER COUNTY

Porter County Commissioner	Jim Biggs
Porter County Council	Jeff Larson
Porter County Surveyor	Kevin Breitzke
Mayor of Portage	John Cannon
Valparaiso City Council	Matt Murphy
<b>Beverly Shores Town Council</b>	<b>Geof Benson*</b>
Burns Harbor Clerk-Treasurer	Jane Jordan
<b>Chesterton Town Council</b>	<b>Jim Ton*</b>
Dune Acres Clerk-Treasurer	Jeannette Bapst
Hebron Town Council	Don Ensign
Kouts Town Council	Blake Jefferson
Ogden Dunes Town Council	Carolyn Saxton
Pines Town Council	Pending
<b>Porter Town Council</b>	<b>Greg Stinson*</b>
Porter Township Trustee	Edward Morales
<b>Union Township Trustee</b>	<b>George H. Topoll*</b>
<b>Governor of Indiana Appointment</b>	<b>Ed Soliday*</b>

## LAPORTE COUNTY

LaPorte County Commissioner	Sheila Matias
LaPorte County Council	Mike Rosenbaum
LaPorte County Surveyor	Anthony Hendricks
<b>Mayor of La Porte</b>	<b>Mark Krentz*</b>
Michigan City City Council	Gene Simmons
Kingsbury Town Council	Mark Ritter
Kingsford Heights	Pending
<b>LaCrosse Town Council</b>	<b>Justin Kiel*</b>
Long Beach Town Council	Dr. Robert Lemay
Michiana Shores Town Council	Jean Poulard
Pottawattamie Park	Pending
Trail Creek	Joshleen Denham
<b>Wanatah Clerk-Treasurer</b>	<b>Diane Noll*</b>
Westville Clerk-Treasurer	Lori Mercer

## In Remembrance

It would be impossible to discuss the achievements of 2019 without remarking upon Mary Thorne. Unfortunately, Mary passed away August 24th, 2019. Mary served as a touchstone between the Commission and NIRPC staff, often as a single point of contact for Commission business. Mary served the Region in this capacity for 13 years. This document, recognizing the accomplishments of the past year, is dedicated to her memory.



## 2019 NIRPC CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Executive Director	Ty Warner AICP	Active Transportation Manager	Mitch Barloga AICP	Technical Assistant	Kevin Polette
Chief of Staff / Director of Environment	Kathy Luther	Long-Range Planner	Gabrielle Biciunas	Production Manager	John Smith
Chief Financial Officer	Talaya Jones / Daria Sztaba	Transportation Projects Manager	Charles Bradsky	Accountant	Jamie Stewart
Director of Transportation	Trey Wadsworth	Carolyn Brown	Secretary	Procurement Coordinator	Lisa Todd
Office Manager	Meredith Stilwell	Executive Assistant	Candice Eklund / Mary Thorne	Transportation Planner / Analyst	Scott Weber
		Public Participation Planner	Dominique Edwards	Transit Planner	James Winters
		Senior Water Resources Planner	Joe Exl		
		Compliance Manager	Allen Hammond	Intern	Kevin Corrigan
		Planning Manager	Eman Ibrahim	Intern	James Gross
		Regional Planner / Analyst	Peter Kimball	Intern	Nathan Pasyk





## Introduction

It is my pleasure to present this 2019 Annual Report of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, launching a new format that follows the revamping of NIRPC's key planning documents and a new logo for the agency. Among the highlights you will see in this report, one of the most significant for expanding NIRPC's service to its members is the official designation of the NIRPC Economic Development District by the Economic Development Administration of the United States Department of Commerce. This Federal designation was finally given to NIRPC in 2019 after over a decade of effort between NIRPC, its partners at the Northwest Indiana Forum, and the public and private individuals who served on the former Northwest Indiana EDD Board. The fundamental benefit of this designation is eligibility, opening additional avenues of Federal funding for projects of general economic development benefit. The timing of this designation could not be better as NIRPC enters the next decade with *NWI 2050*, NIRPC's long-range plan for the future that will guide its regional investments and activities as the worthy successor to the nationally award-winning *2040 Plan*. The vision of *NWI 2050*, as adopted unanimously by the representatives of the towns, cities, and counties that make up Northwest Indiana, is to create a region that is Connected, Renewed, United, and Vibrant. NIRPC's accomplishments in 2019 have laid solid groundwork for making that future a reality over the next decade. I trust the glimpse of past activities in these pages will give a sense of the many efforts of NIRPC's staff who help to advance that vision every day of the year.

On May 16, 2019, the NIRPC Commission approved *NWI 2050*, NIRPC's long-range transportation plan. The planning and outreach process for *NWI 2050* would shape the development of all of NIRPC's core planning activities – calling back again and again to the year of outreach that was conducted between April 2018 and May 2019. This document will demonstrate the link between the formative input from the public and the redevelopment of NIRPC's core planning documents:

<i>NWI 2050:</i>	NIRPC's Long-range Transportation Plan
<i>Invest NWI:</i>	NIRPC's Transportation Improvement Program
<i>Plan NWI:</i>	NIRPC's Unified Planning Work Program
<i>Engage NWI:</i>	NIRPC's Public Participation Plan



Ty Warner  
Executive Director

# 2018 – 2019 NIRPC Engagement Timeline for *NWI 2050*



In the 2018 – 2019 engagement period for the *NWI 2050 Plan*, NIRPC advanced a considerable effort to enhance and improve upon the traditional engagement methods of previous public outreach periods. NIRPC utilized various outreach methods and activities to collaborate with the public. This timeline demonstrates the progression of NIRPC's outreach in conjunction with *NWI 2050* plan development, and also the methods utilized to engage with the public. In addition to these outreach methods, various forms of digital engagement were used throughout the *NWI 2050* Plan process, and are still being used to shape ongoing planning work. These outreach periods, and the corresponding digital outreach, would be instrumental in shaping all the core planning work developed in 2019. These engagement methods would later be formally folded into NIRPC's planning work through the development of a new Public Participation Plan: Engage NWI.

## Engagement Period October 2018 – August 2019

- “Pop-up” Events
- “Out-and-Abouts”
- Public Hearings
- Workshops
- Open Houses

Final plan in May 2019

Start conversations

Find partners

Identify strategies to help us achieve our critical paths

New investment programs designed to “tell a story”

New programmatic approach to allocate funding

Align investments with critical paths and performance-based planning framework

Adopt targets for performance

Linked critical paths to metrics and identified data sources

Establish performance-based planning framework

Identify three futures that NWI should consider

Engagement Period  
October 2018

“Pop-up” Events

## Engagement Terms:

- Pop-up Event: regional planners sharing information / asking for feedback at other organization's events
- Out-and-About: regional planners meeting face-to-face to invite interest in planning activities, events or to solicit direct feedback
- Workshop: regional planners host an interactive training between partners or members of the public centered on a planning topic. May include a presentation.
- Open House: regional planners host a meeting where there is no presentation, but materials are presented in printed format, and planners are nearby to answer questions and engage.

## Engagement Period August – September 2018

“Pop-up” Events

Recommend revised visions + critical paths

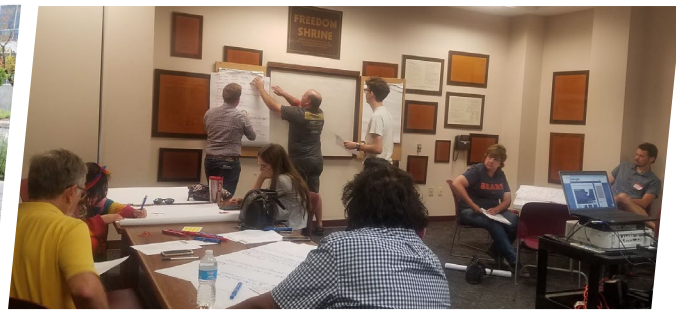
Identify trends and influences on NWI

Confirm vision + goals from 2040 Plan

April 2018

## Engagement Period April – May 2018

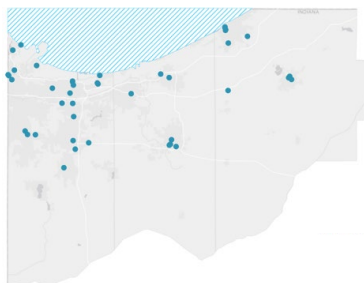
Traditional public meetings





# 2019 In-Person Outreach, Digital Engagements, and the Critical Paths

## 54 In-Person Outreach Engagements in the Field



While the outreach period for the *NWI 2050 Plan* began in 2018, the guidance received from the public has made a distinct and lasting impact on the all the core NIRPC documents developed within the last year; driving NIRPC's mission toward 2050. As such, 2019 really began in April 2018, with the formal kick-off of the visioning process for *NWI 2050*. The vision provided by the public, matched with the *NWI 2050 Plan* focus areas would become the 16 Critical Paths, that would guide short and long-term strategies identified in the plan, investment areas within the Transportation Improvement Program, and planning activities in the United Planning Work Program. Like all good planning, it begins with outreach!

## 16 Critical Paths

### NWI 2050 plan focus areas

<b>Critical paths to achieving NWI's 2050 vision</b>
<b>Economy + Place / Focusing on NWI's economy and quality of place</b>
<b>Environment / Focusing on NWI's environmental quality</b>
<b>Mobility / Focusing on NWI's transportation choices</b>
<b>People + Leaders / Focusing on NWI's people and community leaders</b>

## NWI 2050 vision statements

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

NIRPC worked across the region to engage the public in the planning process. NIRPC made sure that people who are low-income, people who are minorities, and people who are disabled (*Environmental Justice Communities*) were engaged throughout the planning process by targeting and organizing events within or nearby communities that have concentrations of those populations.

NIRPC engaged roughly **400** participants across the region and participated in **54** traditional and non-traditional outreach events. NIRPC also partnered with community organizations, community leaders, universities, and local business owners to work toward a participatory, equitable, and inclusive planning process for all.

NIRPC also utilized social media as a tool of engagement but did not heavily rely on social media as a means of engaging the public. NIRPC analyzed it's social media analytics for **2018 - 2019** to demonstrate the reach of it's digital engagements utilizing virtual public involvement. NIRPC saw a significant uptick in it's digital engagements during planning processes.



Platform	Followers	Page Visits/Views/Watchtime	Impressions	Digital Engagements
Facebook	861	5,582 Daily Engaged Users	62,789	-
Twitter	935	2,026 Page Visits	210,640	137
LinkedIn	51	366 Page Visits	1,990	69.52% Engagement Rate
Instagram	232	54 Page Visits	5,260	3,864
YouTube	47	1.3K Views; 109.5 hours Watchtime	11,865	-
Constant Contact (Email)	1,656	9,090 Total Reads (Weekly Newsletter)		9,090



## Invest NW Planning Process and Highlights

The NWI 2050 planning period was instrumental in the development of all of NIRPC's core planning materials, but this is best illustrated with NIRPC's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): *Invest NWI*. During the outreach period that *launched NWI 2050*, the public was able to weigh-in on the types of transportation programming that was the most important to them. These 13 investment programs were used to rank and score transportation projects in the Region.

Then projects were also scored against their likelihood to benefit the region across all three planning future states identified in *NWI 2050: New Chances for a New Frontier, Sharp and In Focus, and Stay in Your Lane*. Projects were also scored against their potential impact on the region through the 16 Critical Paths, and their difficulty to implement.

Each investment program had its own unique criteria to rank projects applied within each program. This way "Road Improvement" projects did not compete directly with "Transit Operating" projects. However, all 13 investment programs used NIRPC's Environmental Justice and Title VI communities to score projects.

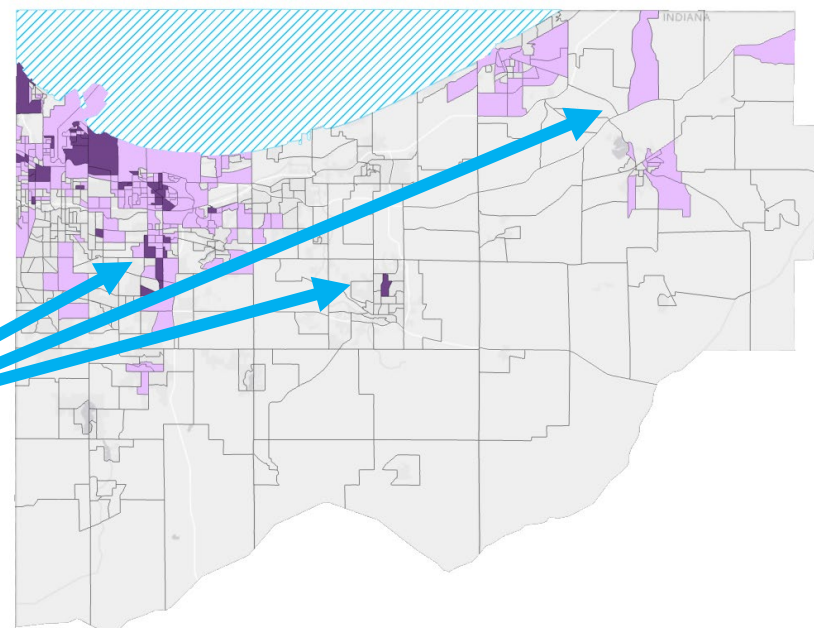
Projects in investment programs that were prioritized by the public, projects that could impact all possible futures, and had the most-positive impact on EJ and Title VI communities received priority for funding.



### How to determine Environmental Justice and Title VI Communities:

- Limited English Proficiency
  - No Vehicle
  - Veteran
  - Disability
  - Senior
  - Low Income
  - Minority
- Areas with a limited proficiency of English greater than 1.9%
- Areas with a population greater than 7.5% with no access to a motor vehicle
- Areas greater than 15.9 % with veterans
- Areas greater than 16.1% with persons 18 or older experiencing a disability
- Areas with population greater than 14.7% over 65 years old
- Areas of population with median household income is below \$42,807
- Areas of population greater than 35.2%

Communities with significant concentrations of four or more of these attributes are designated as Environmental Justice areas and have a priority for funding.

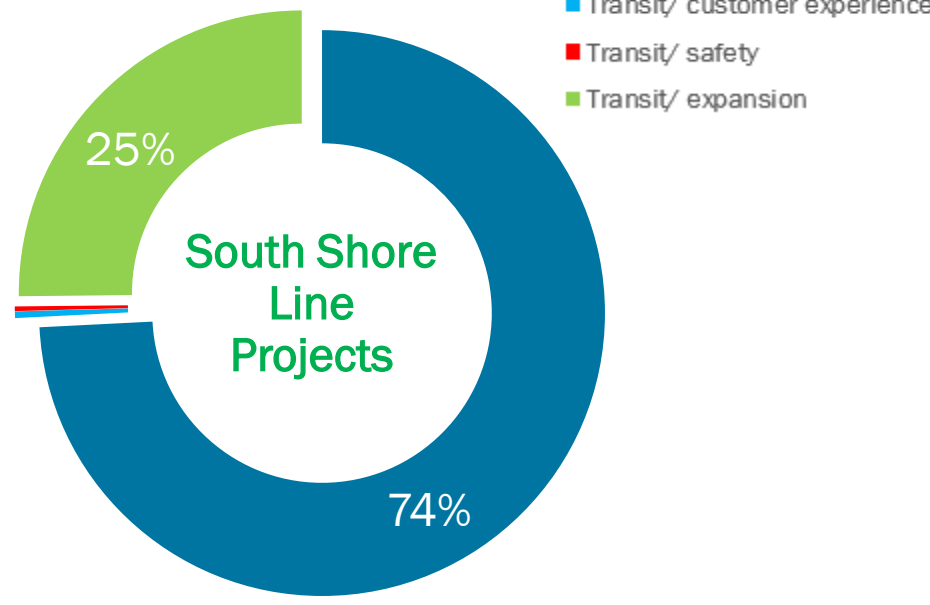
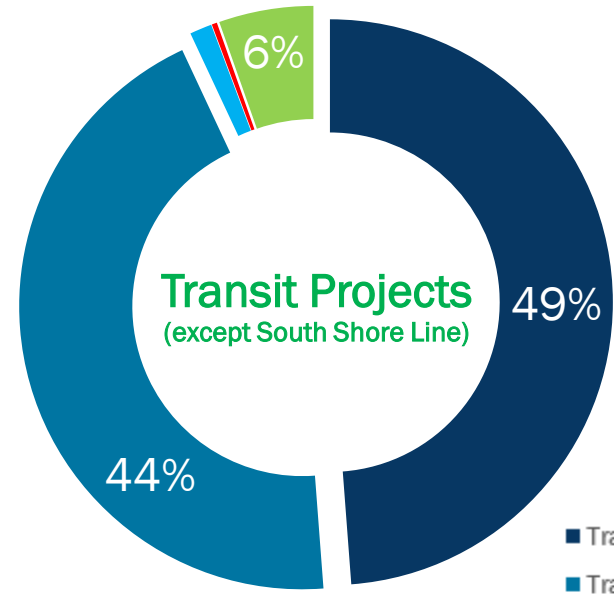
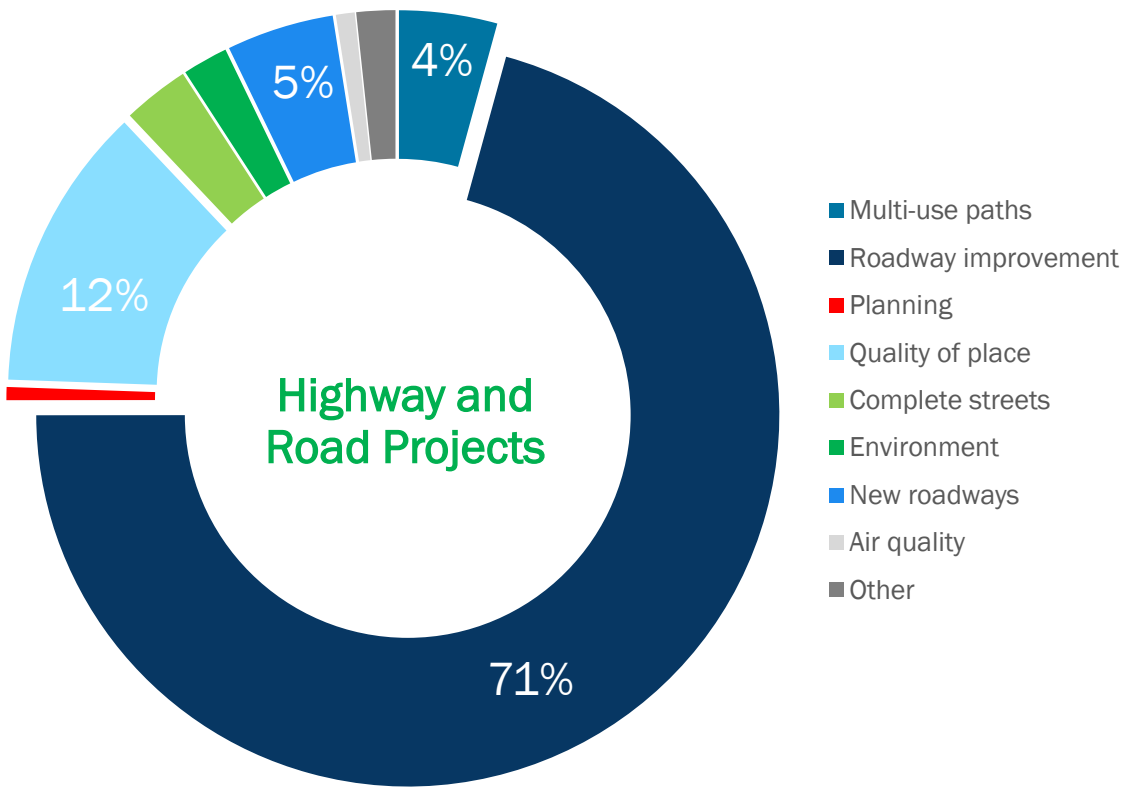




## What programs were funded in the new TIP?

The following three graphs indicate how the \$1.5 billion of combined local, state, and federal transportation investment will be spent between 2020 and 2024.

The first graph is a total of over \$150 million dollars used in highway and road projects within the Region. The following two graphs illustrate how transit funding is being programmed between transit operators. The first of the transit graphs is a summary of all operators except for the South Shore Line/NICTD. The second is the South Shore Line alone.





# Invest NWI: NIRPC's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

## Whose projects were awarded in the TIP?

The following charts provide an overview of what communities, organizations, or transit operators applied for funds in the 2020 – 2024 TIP. These totals include the combined investment of federal, state, and local funds provided in each year by each organization. Highway and road projects are typically matched at an 80/20 rate. Transit projects can either be matched at 80/20 or 50/50 for operating expenses.

	Number of Projects	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Burns Harbor	1	\$ -	\$ 1,247,421	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,247,421
Cedar Lake	1	\$ -	\$ 626,903	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 626,903
Chesterton	1	\$ -	\$ 105,469	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,477,000	\$ 1,582,469
Crown Point	4	\$ 1,450,990	\$ 1,265,000	\$ 1,165,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,501,081
DNR	2	\$ 135,000	\$ 370,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 791,000
East Chicago	3	\$ 4,948,786	\$ 3,285,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 9,387,506
Gary	7	\$ 1,468,140	\$ 4,893,660	\$ 896,000	\$ 3,750,000	\$ 375,000	\$ 15,271,620
Hammond	7	\$ 12,425,000	\$ 2,529,250	\$ -	\$ 6,532,500	\$ 4,333,000	\$ 28,321,995
Highland	1	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 350,000	\$ -	\$ 350,000
Hobart	6	\$ 1,683,600	\$ 8,596,250	\$ -	\$ 3,740,500	\$ 1,924,833	\$ 16,617,423
Kouts	1	\$ 20,800	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 88,494
La Porte	14	\$ 619,100	\$ 1,575,000	\$ 1,010,000	\$ 1,131,250	\$ 437,500	\$ 6,939,872
LaCrosse	1	\$ 25,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 251,431
Lake County	8	\$ 4,297,145	\$ 11,019,500	\$ 1,380,000	\$ 1,380,000	\$ 3,307,400	\$ 24,431,748
Lake Station	1	\$ 568,004	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 568,004
LaPorte County	6	\$ 363,025	\$ 1,335,524	\$ 1,009,240	\$ 1,137,916	\$ 8,308	\$ 4,543,211
Lowell	2	\$ 919,035	\$ -	\$ 548,500	\$ -	\$ 3,599,863	\$ 5,067,398
Merrillville	4	\$ 49,623	\$ 5,290,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,177,275	\$ 11,947,805
Michigan City	9	\$ 2,282,615	\$ 1,014,761	\$ 1,294,000	\$ 287,500	\$ 1,820,000	\$ 6,698,876
Munster	2	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 980,100	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,123,100
Portage	6	\$ 2,966,651	\$ 4,469,450	\$ 203,000	\$ 15,435,000	\$ 2,756,741	\$ 29,398,550
Porter County	10	\$ 828,161	\$ 1,996,520	\$ 1,611,000	\$ 2,706,743	\$ 6,180,000	\$ 14,053,679
Schererville	3	\$ -	\$ 5,508,090	\$ 75,000	\$ 430,500	\$ 10,248,384	\$ 16,810,638
Valparaiso	6	\$ 11,206,312	\$ 3,953,125	\$ 26,250	\$ 350,000	\$ 1,750,000	\$ 21,606,779
Winfield	1	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 488,800	\$ -	\$ 488,800
INDOT	230	\$ 112,529,522	\$ 123,305,294	\$ 76,352,924	\$ 64,001,124	\$ 6,420,939	\$ 407,122,585
Total	337	\$ 158,786,509	\$ 182,386,217	\$ 86,551,014	\$ 101,721,833	\$ 45,816,243	\$ 630,838,388

## Northwestern Indiana Highway and Road Projects:

Federal funding sources used primarily for road and highway projects:

- Surface Transportation Block Grant
- Congestion Mitigation Air Quality
- Highway Safety Improvement Program
- Transportation Alternatives

## Northwestern Indiana Transit Projects:

Federal funding sources used primarily for transit projects:

- 5307 – Urbanized Formula Grants
- 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities
- 5337 – State of Good Repair
- 5339 – Bus and Bus Facilities

	Number of Projects	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
ECT	16	\$ 1,095,053	\$ 1,442,278	\$ 990,515	\$ 1,001,209	\$ 1,012,224	\$ 5,541,279
GPTC	38	\$ 9,236,615	\$ 8,739,538	\$ 8,066,853	\$ 9,986,536	\$ 10,006,465	\$ 46,036,007
MCT	8	\$ 1,500,000	\$ 2,069,000	\$ 2,620,000	\$ 1,575,000	\$ 2,265,026	\$ 10,029,026
South Shore Line	93	\$ 436,399,226	\$ 303,600,824	\$ 32,805,316	\$ 33,380,316	\$ 32,124,316	\$ 838,309,998
North Township	16	\$ 723,650	\$ 598,440	\$ 648,750	\$ 652,570	\$ 656,575	\$ 3,279,985
OE	11	\$ 321,500	\$ 318,700	\$ 322,500	\$ 326,400	\$ 330,300	\$ 1,619,400
PCACS	23	\$ 533,000	\$ 390,000	\$ 390,000	\$ 530,000	\$ 390,000	\$ 2,398,872
LCCS	27	\$ 981,378	\$ 1,021,878	\$ 1,110,078	\$ 1,287,582	\$ 1,309,318	\$ 5,710,234
TransPorte	10	\$ 836,000	\$ 773,200	\$ 1,258,664	\$ 698,357	\$ 1,116,324	\$ 4,682,545
Valparaiso Transit	19	\$ 3,948,375	\$ 7,920,875	\$ 3,730,875	\$ 4,380,875	\$ 4,380,875	\$ 25,546,875
Total	261	\$ 455,574,797	\$ 326,874,733	\$ 51,943,551	\$ 53,818,845	\$ 53,591,423	\$ 943,154,221

## Plan NWI Planning Process and Highlights

With the completion and adoption of NWI 2050, the NIRPC Commission also approved the NWI 2050 Action Plan. The Action Plan provides a template for NIRPC and regional partners to collaborate on strategies designed to implement the vision provided by Northwestern Indiana. The individual strategies, initiatives, and performance measures identified in NWI 2050 became the backbone for NIRPC's new upcoming Unified Planning Work Program: *Plan NWI*.

*Plan NWI* requires NIRPC to document all planning activities over a two-year period. After the outreach period of NWI 2050, all planning activities are tied back to a strategy identified in the long-range plan. This targeted approach to investment and planning means a community-driven effort to implement the vision of the people of Northwestern Indiana.

## NWI 2050 Planning Strategies

### Transportation

- Plan for smart land uses and quality of place
- Plan for Regional Transit
- Plan for Complete Streets and Active Transportation
- Plan for Continually Improved Investment Prioritization
- Plan for Transformative Investments
- Plan for a Regional Data and Analysis Framework
- Plan for an Engaged Public and Share Best-practices
- Plan for more Council of Government Activities

### Environment

- Plan for Asset Vulnerability from Climate Change
- Plan for Green Infrastructure and Open Spaces
- Plan for Brownfield Redevelopment / Remediation
- Plan for Cleaner Air and Energy
- Plan for Watersheds and Water Quality

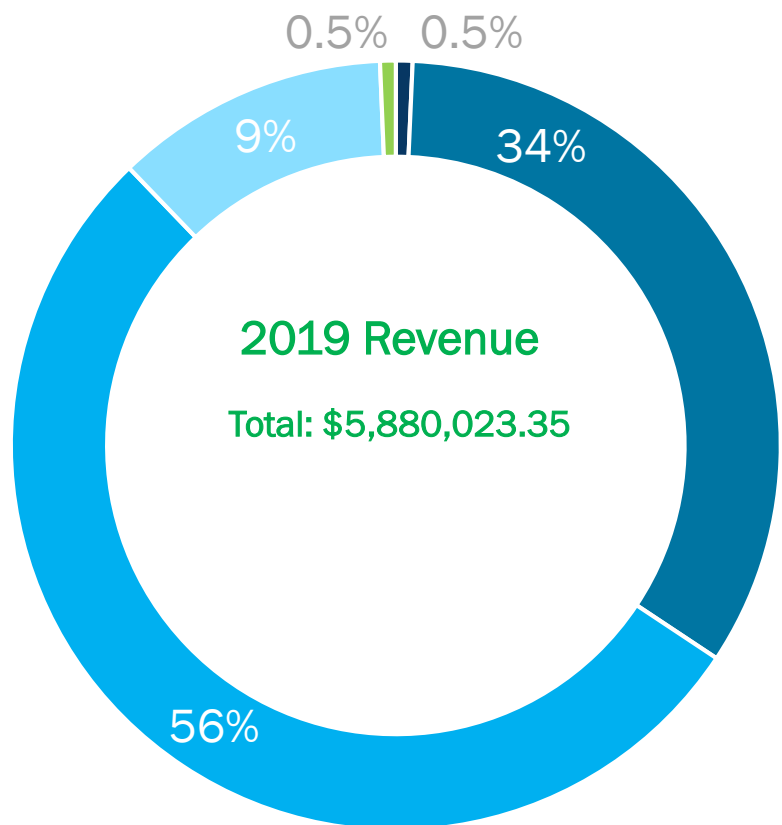
### Economic Development

- Plan for E-commerce Landscape
- Plan for Main Centers and Transit-Oriented Development
- Plan for Economic Development





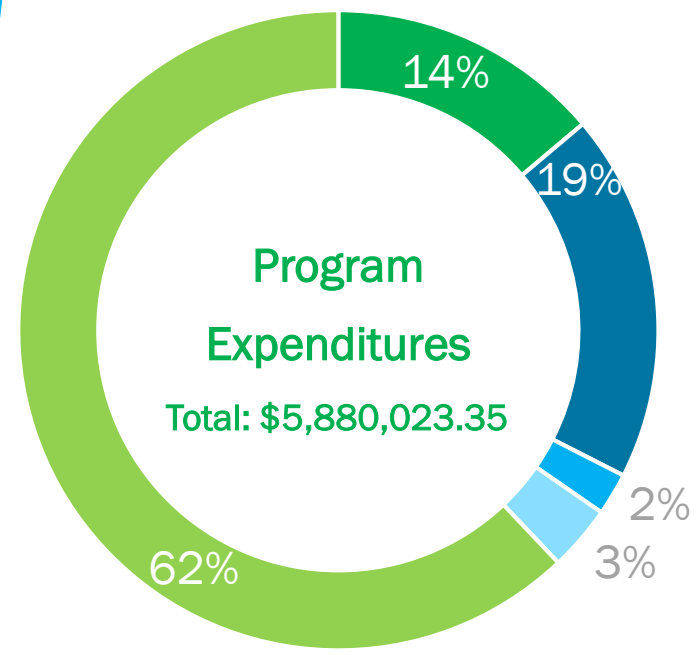
# 2019 Operational Budget



- Partner Agencies - \$32,767.83
- States Grants - \$1,575,844.51
- Federal Grants - \$2,506,873.81
- County Appropriations - \$540,271.00
- LaPorte County Revolving Loan Fund - \$30,808.78

NIRPC's 2019 revenue is comprised of seven revenue sources. These are **county appropriations** from Lake, LaPorte, and Porter Counties - received per statute and used as local share for grants; revenue from the **LaPorte County Revolving Loan Fund** - a loan program managed by NIRPC on behalf of LaPorte County for eligible businesses; revenue from **partner agencies** - including the Kankakee River Yellow River Basin Development Commission and Shared Ethics Advisory Commission; grants from the **State** level; and grants from the **Federal** level.

*In order to access grants to fund its activities benefiting Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties, NIRPC relies on the 70 cents per capita amount it receives from each of those counties for local share to match those grants, as provided in Indiana Code 36-7-7.6-18. This amount has not been changed since 1992 and has never been adjusted for inflation. In 2019, the Commission passed Resolution 19-06 - re-affirmed in Resolution 19-27 - asking the Indiana General Assembly to adjust this per capita amount to current dollars.*



- Transportation Planning - \$814,118.56
- Administration - \$1,096,894.76
- Revolving Loan Fund - \$125,808.78
- Environmental Planning - \$194,002.34
- Transit Oversight & Pass-Through - \$3,649,198.91

NIRPC's 2019 program expenditures is comprised of five categories. These include planning activities involving **transportation**; **administration** expenditures - including all operating costs for NIRPC; the **Revolving Loan Fund** - granting two loans for eligible LaPorte County recipients in 2019 at \$30,000 and \$65,000; **environmental planning** - focused on improving land, water quality, and air quality in Northwest Indiana; and **transit oversight and pass-through** - consisting of salaries and funds to seven sub-recipients for operating costs, preventative maintenance, paratransit, capital cost of contracting, and purchases of buses.



## Engage NWI: NIRPC's Public Participation Plan

The last of NIRPC's core planning activities influenced by April 2018 – May 2019's public outreach period for *NWI 2050*, was the development of a new Public Participation Plan: *Engage NWI*. *Engage NWI* is the federally required "Public Participation Plan" that enables Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) staff to ensure that it is meeting all federal requirements for public participation, but more importantly, a guide that enables the public to engage with regional planning. *Engage NWI* promotes a meaningful exchange of ideas, identification of regional issues and solutions, as well as advancing initiatives to achieve the vision for Northwestern Indiana.

*Engage NWI* streamlines public participation procedures and clarifies when and how the public should be engaged. It establishes shared responsibilities for engagement between the public, NIRPC, and stakeholders.

## Kesling Middle School: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Presentations

NIRPC staff were invited to Kesling Middle School to present to eight 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes about how to prepare for a career in urban planning; and how NIRPC's role in the community impacts the day-to-day lives of students and their families. Students received an overview of the planning profession, *NWI 2050*, and how to participate in planning processes. Each class ended with an interactive game where students pretended to be transportation planners and used real-life infrastructure estimates to plan for real communities in and around the City of LaPorte.



## Outstanding Public Involvement

The organization representing Indiana's Metropolitan Planning Organizations recognized the public involvement activities of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission as being exemplary.

In a ceremony during the Indiana MPO Council's annual conference, NIRPC was presented with the award for Outstanding Public Involvement for its outreach activities related to *NWI 2050* and *Engage NWI* – plans for Northwest Indiana that incorporated non-traditional outreach activities including surveys, workshops, and "pop-up" events across the region.

## ADA Bus Inventory

NIRPC staff catalogued and mapped over 300 bus stops over the summer of 2019. This project, the ADA Bus Inventory, will assist in making bus stops, more accessible for individuals with disabilities. NIRPC staff members travelled throughout the region documenting and assessing each stop and adding it to a map of all regional bus stops. This data will be publicly-accessible so that individuals with disabilities can determine if a stop they are planning to use will meet their needs.

This data will go even further and will be shared with municipalities to assist in the development of their federally-required ADA Transition Plans. These plans are an important part of ensuring that municipalities can transition into complying with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Additionally, NIRPC has secured funding to assist communities with project related to the implementation of their locally-developed ADA Transition Plan. So during the next call for projects, communities can use data from the bus inventory to apply to NIRPC for funding to implement improvements to make their communities accessible for everyone.







## Regional Rail Crossing Task Force

In December 2018, NIRPC organized the Rail Crossing Task Force comprised of local officials and stakeholders to discuss the Supreme Court case concerning train dwell-time at crossings, its impacts on the quality of life and safety issue confronting our region, and options to address the issue. The Rail Crossing Task Force met for three successful meetings in March, May, and October of 2019. The four meetings of the Rail Crossing Task Force provided a number of positive benefits towards the ultimate remediation of the problems facing communities; heard from parties about multiplicities of impacts; understanding the challenges involved in rail operations; established lines of communication with rail entities; learned about other initiatives to attempt to address this issue; connected with all federal elected officials; and developed a better understanding of potential technological innovations. Going forward, NIRPC will continue to work with stakeholders to collect data, collaborate with railroads and push for legislative relief to help improve the quality of life of residents of, and visitors to NW Indiana.

## Award Winning Planning: Greenways+Blueways

NIRPC's *Greenways+Blueways 2020 Plan* garnered a Hoosier Planning Award for Best Practice by the American Planning Association's Indiana Chapter in May 2019. This recognition represents the fifth overall awarded for the plan, which was released in March of 2018.

The *Greenways+Blueways 2020 Plan* represents an innovative study of the interrelation of three focus areas involving conservation and active transportation planning. NIRPC has been a champion for both planning disciplines for over a generation, and the G+B 2020 Plan naturally merges these into a cohesive document, with each discipline strengthening the other.

Since the plan's approval, a number of action items identified in the *G+B 2020 Plan* have developed. Primary among these involves the creation of a "Living Streets Policy" which supplants NIRPC's 2010 Complete Streets Policy. The draft of this policy will be reviewed by topical committees in January of 2020, with an expected approval by spring.



## Trail Towns Workshop

On October 31st, NIRPC, in conjunction with the Greenways Foundation, hosted over 35 stakeholders to take part in a Trail Town Workshop. Trail Towns represents an emerging tourism program to attract trail users to visit and shop communities which they cross through. Today in the NIRPC Region, over 170 miles of trails exist, with many of these miles traversing through downtown districts.

Amy Camp, who is a consultant with Cycle Forward, presented a half-day workshop on Trail Town program, which she has been directly involved with. Currently a number of communities, and two states, have developed programs that emulate the Trail Town principles of creating bicycle friendly businesses to attract visitors. The model has proven vastly successful with communities along the Great Allegheny Passage Trail in Maryland and Pennsylvania, and opportunities abound with Indiana's burgeoning statewide network. The Greenways Foundation hosted six of these workshops throughout Indiana and aims to work with state entities to develop a certification program sometime in 2020.

## Next Level Trails Regional Winners

In the fall of 2018, Governor Eric Holcomb announced the Next Level Trails program, which sets aside \$90 million in state money for trail development throughout Indiana. The program is being administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and will be divided into three funding cycles.

The first of these cycles awarded \$25 million in May, and three projects in the NIRPC region received funding. These include \$1.7 million to Burns Harbor for the Marquette Greenway, \$302K to Hebron for the Veterans Memorial Trail, and \$2.9 million to Schererville for the Penny Greenway. The total combined distance for all three projects is 4.7 miles. Each of these projects are expected to finish in 2021. Further awards for the next two rounds of funding are expected throughout 2020.





### Chicago Area Waterway System Invasive Species Stakeholder Group

Since 2010, the Great Lakes Commission has been leading efforts to prevent Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species from entering the Great Lakes basin from the Mississippi River watershed through the critical Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). Effective in 2019, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission has transitioned into the convener role, and member of the CAWS Species Stakeholder Group. Working with regional stakeholders and other leaders, NIRPC is seeking short and long-term solutions to the threat of Asian carp and other invasive-species passing through the regional water systems while maintaining current uses of regional waterways. The group consists of representatives from regional public and private stakeholders, representing governmental, commercial, recreational, business, and environment sectors.

### Brownfields

2019 was an exciting year for NIRPC and for Northwest Indiana's brownfield redevelopment efforts. NIRPC was awarded a new \$600,000 Brownfield Coalition Assessment Grant in partnership with the RDA and the NWI Forum Foundation. This project gets underway as successes of previous EPA investments in Northwest Indiana through RDA's coalition partnership with NIRPC, Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago are realized. On March 26, Mayor Copeland, Fresenius Corporation, and others held a ribbon cutting for the state-of-the-art dialysis facility opening on Main Street where Coalition funds assessed, removed tanks and planned clean-up where a shuttered car repair once previously stood. Chief of Staff and Environmental Director Kathy Luther continued to work with the RDA and the Cities of East Chicago, Gary, and Hammond to strategically invest the balance of the 2013 Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund as evidenced at the October 29th Groundbreaking for Lakeshore Manor, a new East Chicago housing development.



### Urban Forestry / CommuniTree

As NIRPC continued year 3 of the CommuniTree Program, over 700 native trees were awarded to communities and public organizations in Northwest Indiana's Lake Michigan watershed this fall. NIRPC, as a partner in the CommuniTree Program, uses grant funding from the U.S. Forest Service to purchase native trees at a quantity discount and subaward them to communities to help restore urban tree canopy loss due to the invasive insect, the emerald ash borer. Over the past three years, more than 5,000 trees and 50 different tree species have been planted and maintained by CommuniTree Program partners and local communities. CommuniTree Partners also held workshops on planting the right tree in the right place, planting and caring for young trees, and pruning; to local staff to ensure the long-term return on this investment for NWI.

### Big Changes in NIRPC's Air Quality Programs:

2019 saw big changes in NIRPC's 20 year old Air Quality Public Education Programs. For several years, South Shore Clean Cities has successfully implemented air quality education and technical assistance to public and private fleet operators throughout our region through the Green Fleets partnership. 2019 saw the reward of many of these efforts when 10 NWI public and private Green Fleet participants received \$3.5 M in VW Mitigation Settlement funds, representing one third of the state total. As funding rules changed at the state level, requiring greater cash match capacity than NIRPC was able to secure, the general public education program seamlessly transferred to SSCC's capable hands. As our region continues to be designated in non compliance for Ozone by the US EPA, it is important that the entire region remain aware of what we all can do to contribute to cleaner air.

### VW Mitigation Fund Awardees:

ADS Logistics	\$800,000
City of Hobart	\$107,244
City of Michigan City	\$171,133
East Chicago Schools	\$129,700
Gary Public Transportation Corp.	\$800,000
Homewood Disposal	\$209,211
Jack Gray	\$725,881
Lake Station Schools	\$72,043
Michigan City Schools	\$207,699
Roll & Hold Warehouse	\$326,551



## 2019 Planning Highlights: *Economic Development*



### EDD Designation

NIRPC received designation from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) of the United States Department of Commerce as an Economic Development District (EDD), bringing to fruition over a decade of concerted regional effort to achieve the designation for greater economic development in northwest Indiana. The designation for the area of Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties in Indiana opens the door to additional funding assistance from the EDA for economic development-related purposes not previously available to the region.

The District will leverage the involvement of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in a partnership to provide a coordinated strategy and provide economic development technical assistance. This designation will also help lead a regional economic development planning process and roadmap for regional collaboration and will significantly enhance the services NIRPC provides by providing more economic resources. The EDD designation is consistent with NIRPC's charge within its state enabling legislation to "institute and maintain a comprehensive planning and programming process for: (1) transportation, (2) economic development, and (3) environmental policy.

### Regional Economic Diversification Summit

On May 1, 2019, NIRPC in partnership with the NWI Forum and the Economic Development Administration (EDA), hosted a Regional Economic Diversification Summit. A daylong event on information dialogue and resource sharing with a focus on working together to advance economic development. Nearly a dozen Federal partner agencies were in attendance to provide information programs and additional support. The event highlighted three topic areas: Agricultural Economy, Commercial & Industrial Redevelopment, and Broadband. The panels for each topic presented facets of these issues as particular to Northwest Indiana, and concluded with Federal partners matching their respective grant program to Northwest Indiana's issues.



### Northwest Indiana Urban Food Systems: FED Event

During 2019, the NWI Food Council hosted the third annual FED: Food Expo & Discussions regional event on February 22, 2019 with over 200 community members participating. The collaborative event focused on regenerative farming, food waste and community building across Northwest Indiana. The 3rd annual FarmHop was held on August 10 and September 21 highlighting a series of farm tours around the 7 counties of Northwest Indiana. Nearly 20 farms were featured on this year's FarmHop tours, from rural to urban, organic to conventional.

### LaPorte Revolving Loan Fund

As 2019 drew to a close, the Loan Board for the LaPorte Revolving Loan Fund that NIRPC has managed since 1987 met and approved a \$65,000 loan for the Bare Bones Gastropub LLC. Bare Bones is brought to LaPorte by the same partners who created the award winning microbrewery and tap-house Burn 'Em Brewing LLC in Michigan City. The Gastropub will be a family friendly, fast casual dining and beverage experience with a focus on unique quality products produced locally and regionally. NIRPC has managed the LaPorte County RLF since 1987. Since its start with a \$700,000 EDA grant matched by \$267,000 from La Porte and Michigan City the RLF has loaned over \$3.9 Million to small businesses in LaPorte County through 64 loans.





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