



# annual 2021 **report**

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# Warm Welcome

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## A message from NIRPC Executive Director Ty Warner, AICP

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While the pandemic continued on through 2021, NIRPC persevered in maintaining a comprehensive and collaborative planning and programming process for the residents and businesses of Northwest Indiana. On top of COVID challenges, 2021 brought a “perfect storm” of coinciding federal review deadlines, including a once-every-three-year review of NIRPC’s transit funding process by the Federal Transit Administration and a once-every-four-year review of NIRPC’s certification as a Metropolitan Planning Organization by FTA and the Federal Highway Administration. Even while working in a mostly remote environment, NIRPC came out of its Triennial Review with no

deficiencies, and NIRPC was re-certified as an MPO with no corrective actions cited. These outcomes are a testament to the NIRPC staff’s commitment to serve the region with integrity and professionalism as supported by the Commission’s leadership. The perseverance of staff and the Commission also led to the award of \$17.8 million for the Marquette Greenway through the USDOT’s nationally-competitive RAISE grant, which will complete this 60-mile trail between Chicago and New Buffalo, Michigan. With the hiring in 2021 of a new Director of Transportation, NIRPC is poised to take the region’s mobility and planning efforts to the next level, and with the launch at the end of 2021 of a planning process to develop an Economic Resiliency Plan for Northwest Indiana through a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, NIRPC is helping to ensure that the region continues to thrive through this pandemic and through whatever challenges the future holds as we head into 2022 and beyond.



NIRPC is the Metropolitan Planning Organization and Council of Governments for Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties in Northwest Indiana. Working collaboratively across the region, NIRPC coordinates regional comprehensive planning and programming for transportation, economic development, and environmental policy.



Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

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# About **NIRPC**

## NIRPC Functions

### **Council of Governments**

A governmental forum of elected officials to discuss regional issues and public governance, representing 41 municipalities and the three county governments of Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties. Authorized by state statute.

### **Metropolitan Planning Organization**

Agency to oversee long- and short-range regional transportation, transit, and non-motorized transportation planning in Northwest Indiana. Designated by the US Department of Transportation.

### **Economic Development District**

Entity responsible to administer the regional economic development planning process and to foster economic prosperity and resiliency in the region. NIRPC maintains the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Designated by the US Economic Development Administration.

### **Environmental**

Facilitator of long-range environmental goals, connecting entities, policy, and programs to funding and implementation resources. Authorized by state statute.

### **Best Practices & Services**

Agency services provide large-scale data analysis of government information, expert guidance, and communal resources for all municipalities. Expertise in land use, mapping, economic development trends, environmental and transportation best practices. Authorized by state statute.

## Mission

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) is a regional council of local governments serving the citizens of Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties in Northwest Indiana. It is organized under the provisions of Indiana Code 36-7-7.6.

NIRPC provides a forum that enables the citizens of Northwest Indiana to address regional issues relating to transportation, the environment, and economic development.

NIRPC has a six-fold mission:

- ▶ To serve as Northwest Indiana's metropolitan planning organization and act as the designated recipient for certain transportation funding;
- ▶ To generate meaningful dialogue and cooperation on issues of common concern;
- ▶ To contribute to the development of a common vision pertaining to Northwest Indiana's future;
- ▶ To provide a forum in which elected officials and other decision-makers can develop and implement solutions to regional problems;
- ▶ To create opportunities for partnership between the public and private sectors; and
- ▶ To provide a common voice for Northwest Indiana in its communications with the state and the federal government.

This mission is achieved through the performance of seven core functions:

- ▶ The identification and framing of issues of concern;
- ▶ Advocacy;
- ▶ The identification of potential funding sources and the pursuit of funding;
- ▶ Project planning, plan implementation, programming, and coordination;
- ▶ Participation in partnerships;
- ▶ Sub-grantee administration; and
- ▶ The direct provision of technical services, data, and other resources.

The seven functions pertain to NIRPC's statutory purpose, which is to provide a coordinated management process for Lake, Porter, and La Porte Counties and to institute and maintain a comprehensive planning and programming process for:

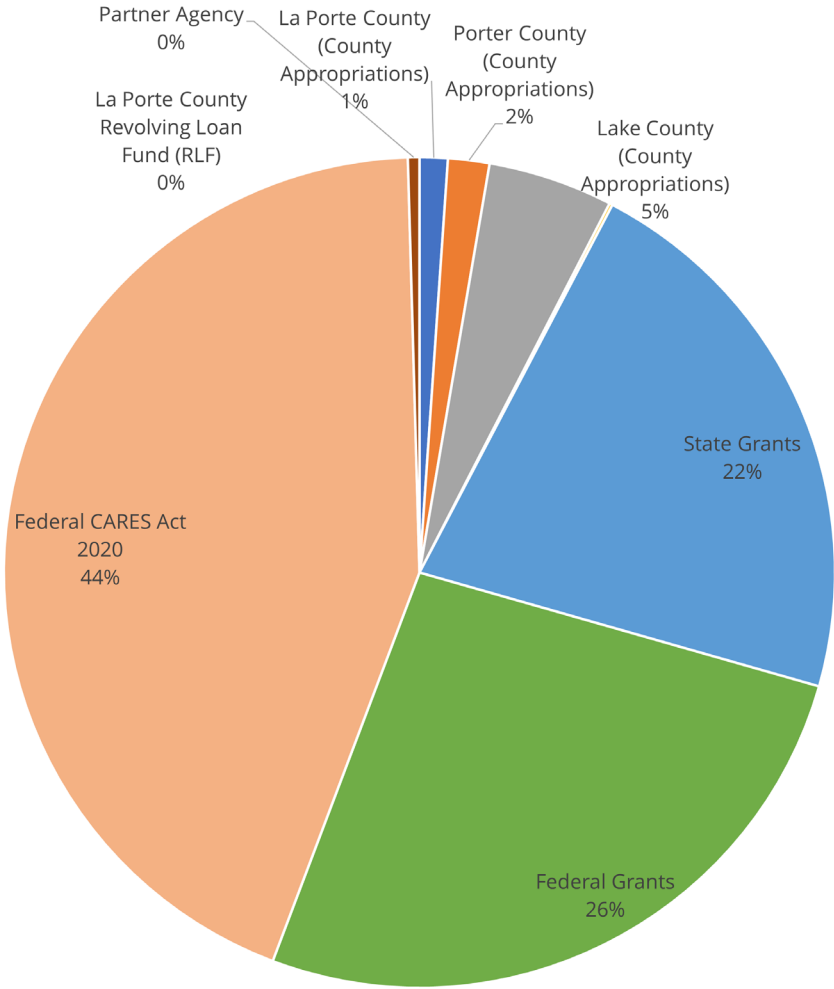
- ▶ Transportation;
- ▶ Economic development; and
- ▶ Environmental policy.

# Financials

Fiscal Year 2021

## Agency Revenue

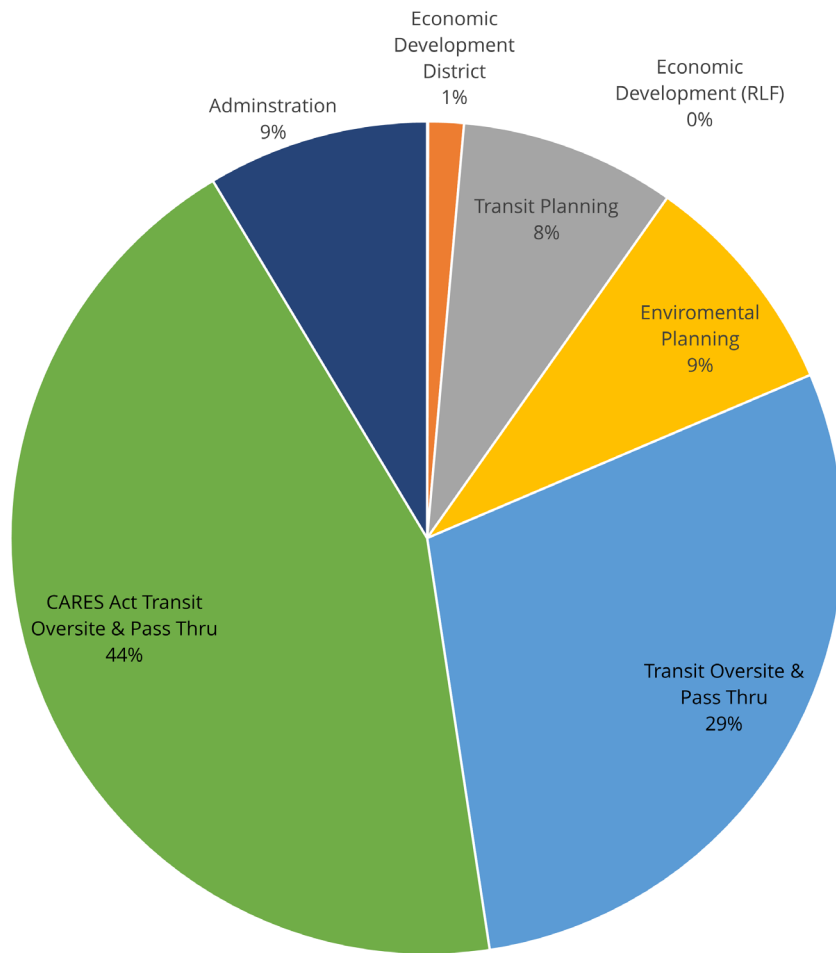
**\$ 7,142,319**



	\$ Dollars
La Porte County (County Appropriations)	78,027
Porter County (County Appropriations)	115,040
Lake County (County Appropriations)	347,204
La Porte County Revolving Loan Fund (RLF)	8,778
State Grants	1,552,209
Federal Grants	1,880,275
Federal CARES Act 2020	3,128,866
Partner Agency	31,920

# Agency Expenditures

\$ 7,142,319



	\$ Dollars
Economic Development (RLF)	2,682
Economic Development District	98,528
Transit Planning	597,235
Environmental Planning	629,514
Transit Oversight & Pass-Through	2,071,606
CARES Act Transit Oversight & Pass-Through	3,128,866
Administration	613,888

## TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSIT

Northwest Indiana's transportation infrastructure is not static. The system must adjust to the patterns that arise from residents living their daily lives and moving around the region to do so. Bike routes, sidewalks, trails, public transit, and roadways must be resilient, and must be coordinated among the communities in Northwest Indiana. NIRPC plays a critical role in this process—the policies, design, innovations, implementation, and oversight that adapts the system to its best use.

As a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), NIRPC oversees decisions on regional transportation, including selection of projects that receive federal funding. MPOs develop three key planning work products: the long-term Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), titled *NWI 2050* in Northwest Indiana; the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP); and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a comprehensive schedule of regional federally-funded and significant transportation projects.

*NWI 2050* guides long-term regional planning decisions in Northwestern Indiana. *NWI 2050* covers all modes of transportation: active transportation, like walking and biking; public transit; and automobiles. It also considers the land use and environmental impacts of transportation policies and spending. NIRPC is preparing to update the plan, to be completed by 2023.

*NWI 2050* established priorities for our region. Among these are revitalizing the urban core of the region, encouraging patterns of land development that encourage walking and biking, and use of public transit to reduce reliance on driving. These priorities follow through in NIRPC's work:

- ▶ NIRPC's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study, developed in 2021, will open funding and support the project selection process for development within the Transit Development Districts (TDD) that NICTD and RDA are developing along commuter rail line stations.
- ▶ Planners created an online map for bus lines in Northwest Indiana that provides useful details on each bus stop for all riders, including those with disabilities.
- ▶ NIRPC partnered with municipalities in Northwest Indiana to develop new signage on the region's trail system to direct pedestrians and bicyclists to restaurants and shopping districts along the trails.
- ▶ Large and small Infrastructure projects, such as widening roads and installing crosswalks, increased safety and reduced negative impacts like congestion and sprawl.



# MPO

Metropolitan Planning Organization

The NIRPC MPO sets transportation policy, planning, and programming for all federally-funded transportation and transit projects in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties. The MPO is designated by the US Department of Transportation.

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2021 was a great year for transportation in NWI. We received nearly \$18 million to design and build the Marquette Greenway. NICTD started construction on the new Westlake rail extension and the double-track project on the South Shore Line. NIRPC, NICTD, and RDA began developing transit-oriented development plans around current and future transit stations. Together, these and other projects are transforming NWI!

**Thomas Dow, AICP, Director of Transportation**

## URBAN PLANNING & GETTING AROUND

*NWI 2050* established priorities for Northwest Indiana: revitalize the urban core of the region and to encourage land development patterns that support walking, biking and public transit and reduce reliance on driving for all trips. Another key priority is to maintain and improve the existing transportation system before expanding it.

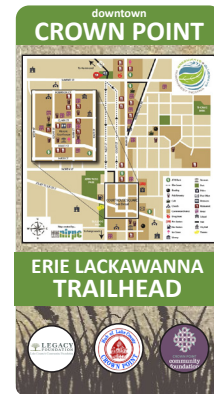


Singing Sands Trail in Michigan City and Burns Harbor Trail in Burns Harbor opened in 2021. Both trails are segments of the Marquette Greenway plan.

## NEW TRAILS & WAYFINDING

Rails-to-trails initiatives continue to be prime opportunities for trail development and enhancement of the existing trail system. The Singing Sands Trail Phases I and II in Michigan City and the Marquette Greenway in Burns Harbor were opened. Along the Indiana-Illinois border, municipal officials and NIRPC collaborated to reroute the Old Plank Road Trail to connect at the state line.

New trail signage supports economic development as a trail enters a town. Map and information kiosks, large municipal welcome signs, wayfinding signage, and maps include directions to local downtown areas, restaurants, and retail districts.



## Marquette Greenway



The US Department of Transportation awarded the Marquette Greenway project \$17.8 million from a 2021 RAISE infrastructure grant to fund the final 17 segments that complete the continuous 60-mile trail. The Greenway is set to receive an Indiana state READI grant award of up to \$3 million and funding through the Department of Natural Resources Next Level Trails program.

The Marquette Greenway creates an uninterrupted trail through the Northwest Indiana South Shore region, running between Calumet Park in Chicago and New Buffalo, Michigan. It will connect 130,000 residents within a half-mile of the corridor and regional and national trail systems, and traverses

a diverse geographic, ecological, and socio-economical region. Twenty-one miles are complete, including new segments opened in 2021.

NIRPC is the designated administrator of the Marquette Greenway trail project, will manage funding and overall project management, and will work with municipal entities on design, engineering, and construction for these segments. Indiana Dunes National Park and nine municipalities have pledged matching funds toward the project.

At a Glance

Transit Ridership  
(NIRPC Subrecipients)

Subrecipient	Service Type	2019 Ridership	2020 Ridership	2021 Ridership
East Chicago Transit	Fixed Route	112,862	67,108	Not Available
	Complementary Paratransit	4,923	4,968	Not Available
Lake County Community Services	Demand Response Service	43,445	22,348	30,740
LaPorte TransPorte	Demand Response Service	42,352	28,291	32,867
North Township Dial-A-Ride	Demand Response Service	15,940	9,377	9,368
Opportunity Enterprises	Demand Response Service	83,813	58,708	36,774
Porter County Aging and Community Services	Demand Response Service	25,353	18,081	14,419
Valparaiso	Demand Response Service (V-Line)	111,633	76,233	69,454
	Commuter Service	65,216	19,817	14,524

(ChicaGo Dash & South Shore Connect)

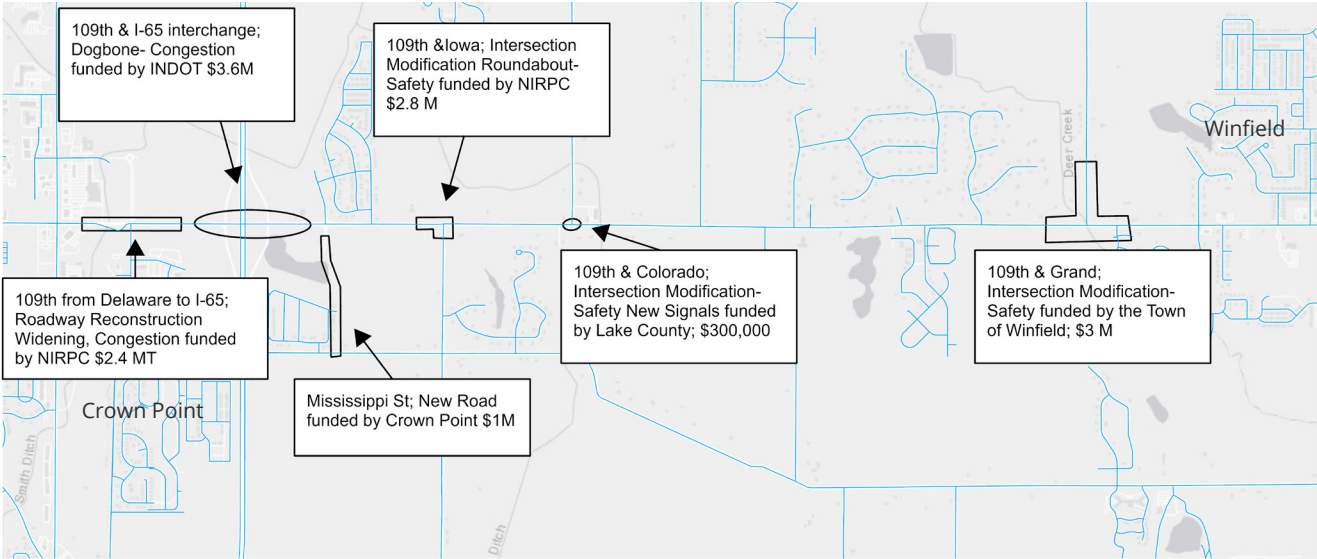
109th Street Corridor



Roundabout at 109th St. and Iowa St., Crown Point. Source: INDOT

NIRPC, INDOT, Lake County, and the cities of Crown Point and Winfield came together to complete major work along 109th Street, running between Crown Point and Winfield in unincorporated Lake County. Increased traffic congestion and high-profile accidents made the existing roadway unsuitable for the shift to the new traffic environment. The corridor improvements included six major projects, with NIRPC's contribution of \$5.2 million. In the end, segments of the roadway were widened, safety signals updated, and five intersections were improved, including a NIRPC-funded roundabout. INDOT redesigned access to I-65, adding a "dog-bone" roundabout at entrances to the highway. The City of Crown Point added a new road at Mississippi Street and the City of Winfield reworked the intersection at Grand Avenue.

Construction along 109th Street Corridor, between Crown Point and Winfield





## LARGE PROJECTS, SMALL PROJECTS, BIG IMPACT

### WIDER ROADS AND MAIN ARTERIES

The largest projects with phases completed in 2021 were responses to shifts in traffic patterns and population growth. These projects have spanned multiple phases over several years and have major implications on traffic flow, road capacity, congestion management, and safety.

Phase II work of the 109th Street Corridor, completed in 2021, includes intersection work, roundabouts, and redesigned highway access.

The roadway along Chicago Avenue in Hammond was doubled to four lanes from a two-lane city street with parking, using \$6.2 million in federal transportation funds. The Chicago Avenue connection to Illinois is now suited as a principal artery to accommodate growth, increased truck traffic, and to alleviate congestion.

In unincorporated Lake County, the 3-mile span along 45th Avenue between Gary and Griffith was widened during Phase II in 2021. NIRPC's contribution was \$3.2 million on a total \$4.7 million project. The project, entering Phase III, has required the purchase of nearly 200 parcels for right-of-way. In addition to roadway work, utility work brought residents along 45th Street access to improved utilities, city water, and city sewage.

### SAFETY AROUND CAMPUS

Federal transportation funds in the TIP are often allotted to projects with a smaller but nevertheless important impact. Projects improving pedestrian safety, including several new traffic crossings near school zones, made a positive impact in 2021 on community safety, walkability, traffic control, and quality of place.

At Purdue Northwest in Hammond, the entrance at 173rd Street now includes a pedestrian island, in addition to a modernized intersection and bus stop. The City of Hammond sponsored the project, with a \$1.2 million contribution from NIRPC transportation funds. The intersection provides a safer crossing against busy traffic and makes the campus area more easily walkable.

The City of Hobart installed sidewalks at Hobart Middle School with NIRPC's contribution of \$300,000 in transportation funds, adding safety for students walking to school.

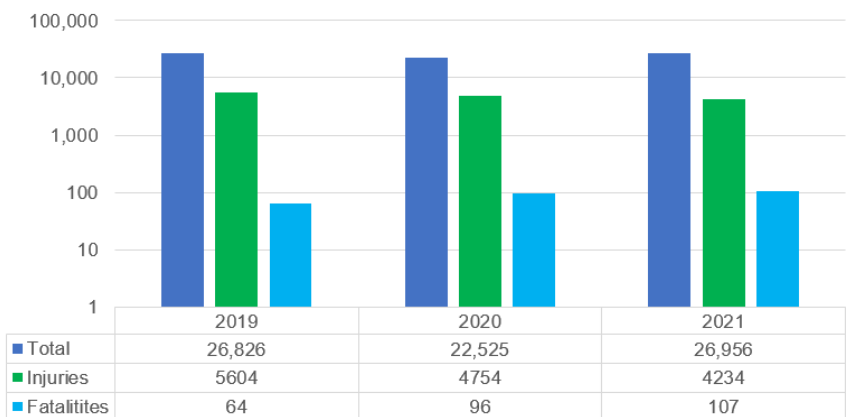
At the Hanover Central High School in Cedar Lake, an influx of students are walking to school from a new residential development built on former farmland. A new traffic signal was installed at 133rd Avenue and King Street with \$340,000 in transportation funds, providing a safe place for students to cross the busy intersection and reducing the potential for pedestrian accidents.



NIRPC's study, *E-commerce in Northwest Indiana* received an Achievement Award from the National Association of Regional Councils.

## At a Glance

### Automobile Crashes in Northwest Indiana

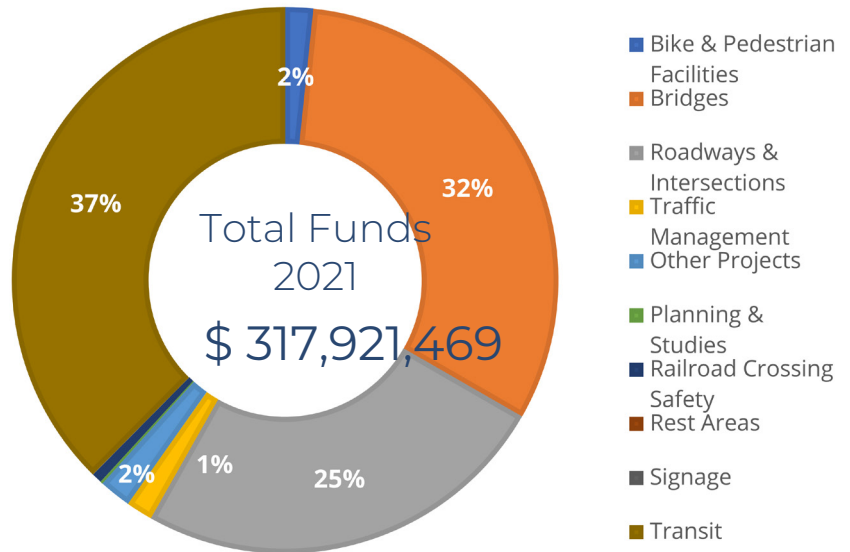


■ Total ■ Injuries ■ Fatalities

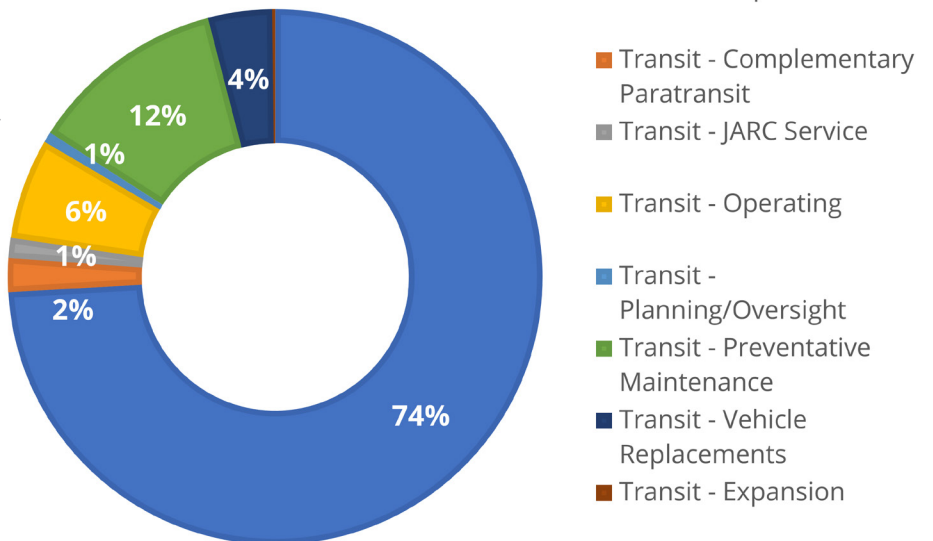


## Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

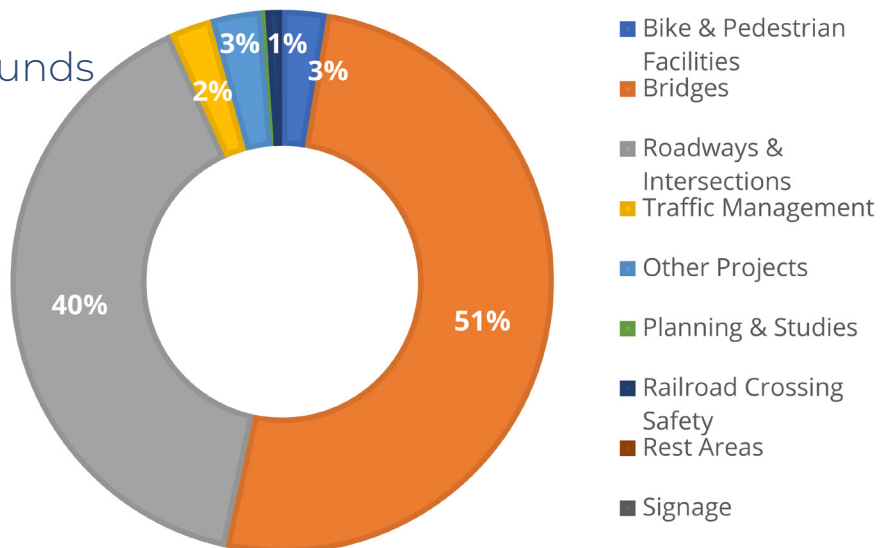
The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is the schedule of transportation projects in Northwest Indiana that either receive federal funding or are regionally significant. The TIP includes projects managed by the Indiana Department of Transportation, cities and towns, counties, and transit operators over a four-year period. Roadways and bridges, public transit, trail development and other types of projects are all included in the TIP.



## Transit Funds 2021 \$119,463,483

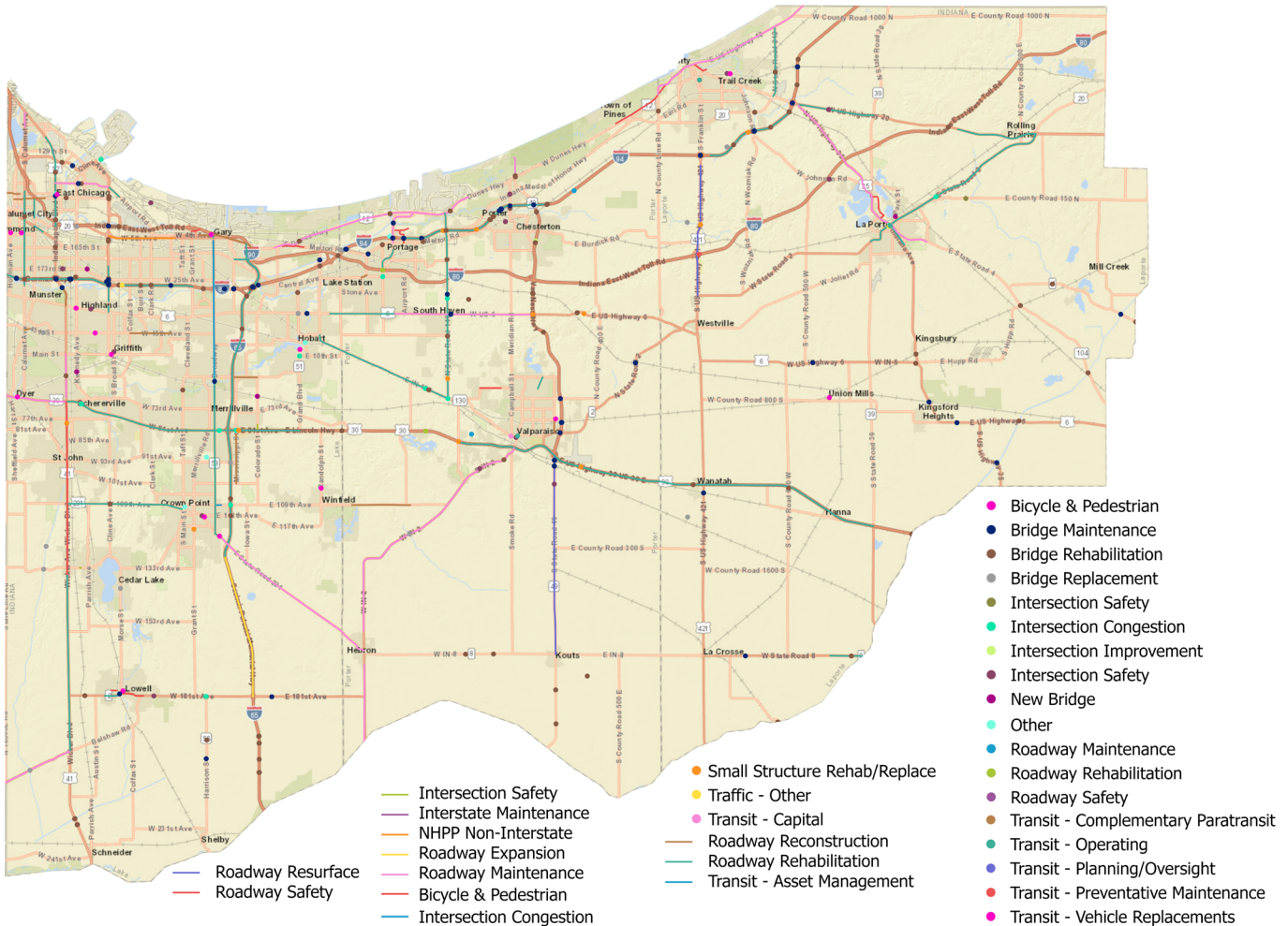


## Transportation Funds 2021 \$198,457,986



# 2021 TIP Projects

## Annual List of Projects (ALOP)



## TIP Funding Distribution - By Type

Transportation Funding	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total 2022-26
Bike & Pedestrian Facilities	\$5,255,044	\$6,774,519	\$9,369,583	\$9,189,228	\$6,521,700	\$4,185,687	\$36,040,717
Bridges	\$100,623,267	\$88,117,186	\$88,389,917	\$121,434,114	\$38,688,301	\$32,488,412	\$369,117,930
Roadways & Intersections	\$79,072,382	\$41,257,572	\$183,563,680	\$88,469,273	\$50,303,598	\$85,997,658	\$449,591,781
Traffic Management	\$5,031,500	\$8,952,028	\$6,028,341	\$30,420,000	\$1,849,789	\$0	\$47,250,158
Other Projects	\$6,053,543	\$14,026,686	\$26,453,438	\$4,346,142	\$5,356,141	\$20,211,691	\$70,394,098
Planning & Studies	\$470,000	\$516,306	\$518,295	\$520,344	\$522,426	\$524,635	\$2,602,006
Railroad Crossing Safety	\$1,920,000	\$1,027,130	\$1,580,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,607,130
Rest Areas	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,562,815	\$21,468,800	\$0	\$23,031,615
Signage	\$32,250	\$160,000	\$470,188	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$630,188
Transit	\$119,463,483	\$51,573,242	\$54,343,586	\$53,942,039	\$67,975,237	\$57,527,287	\$285,361,391
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$317,921,469</b>	<b>\$212,404,669</b>	<b>\$370,717,028</b>	<b>\$309,883,955</b>	<b>\$192,685,992</b>	<b>\$200,935,370</b>	<b>\$1,286,627,014</b>

Transit Funding	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total 2022-2026
Transit - Capital	\$88,510,144	\$29,351,759	\$29,790,809	\$29,259,284	\$9,857,891	\$9,732,460	\$107,992,203
Transit - Complementary Paratransit	\$2,443,813	\$1,239,833	\$1,294,697	\$1,352,089	\$0	\$0	\$3,886,619
Transit - JARC Service	\$1,451,246	\$1,451,246	\$1,451,246	\$1,451,246	\$0	\$0	\$4,353,738
Transit - Operating	\$7,264,154	\$5,441,868	\$5,855,561	\$6,194,818	\$11,324,831	\$1,257,835	\$30,074,913
Transit - Planning/Oversight	\$764,375	\$704,750	\$534,763	\$553,551	\$1,100,000	\$100,000	\$2,993,064
Transit - Preventative Maintenance	\$14,201,486	\$12,101,486	\$12,101,486	\$12,101,486	\$27,247,412	\$28,579,739	\$92,131,609
Transit - Vehicle Replacements	\$4,617,345	\$1,282,300	\$3,315,024	\$3,029,565	\$3,779,575	\$3,191,725	\$14,598,189
Transit - Expansion	\$210,920	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$14,665,528	\$14,665,528	\$29,331,056
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$119,463,483</b>	<b>\$51,573,242</b>	<b>\$54,343,586</b>	<b>\$53,942,039</b>	<b>\$67,975,237</b>	<b>\$57,527,287</b>	<b>\$285,361,391</b>



# TIP Funding Distribution

## Funding Distribution among Public Agencies

## TIP Projects in Northwest Indiana

Municipality or Agency	No. of Projects	Dollars for 2021	Dollars for 2022	Dollars for 2023	Dollars for 2024	Dollars for 2025
Burns Harbor	1	\$40,000	\$769,176	\$0	\$0	\$0
Cedar Lake	2	\$764,403	\$50,000	\$110,000	\$0	\$2,189,125
Chesterton	2	\$183,941	\$150,000	\$1,783,941	\$0	\$1,849,789
Crown Point	2	\$2,803,760	\$1,014,000	\$1,970,000	\$1,165,000	\$0
East Chicago	3	\$0	\$4,967,448	\$1,035,000	\$0	\$0
Gary	4	\$4,883,502	\$1,356,626	\$0	\$4,125,000	\$0
Griffith	1	\$0	\$0	\$121,800	\$0	\$425,000
Hammond	7	\$12,830,248	\$0	\$9,795,000	\$4,025,000	\$3,245,133
Highland	1	\$350,000	\$0	\$350,000	\$0	\$0
Hobart	4	\$750,000	\$4,574,166	\$3,740,500	\$0	\$0
La Porte	10	\$721,250	\$2,028,930	\$1,863,150	\$437,500	\$1,156,653
La Porte County	11	\$990,337	\$3,150,894	\$3,432,167	\$78,308	\$3,325,850
Lake County	8	\$3,532,478	\$11,487,485	\$1,490,000	\$3,777,909	\$5,175,000
Lake Station	1	\$0	\$0	\$68,750	\$0	\$0
Lowell	2	\$735,410	\$548,500	\$0	\$3,599,863	\$0
Merrillville	4	\$4,506,295	\$1,080,000	\$0	\$1,302,275	\$0
Michigan City	5	\$1,354,761	\$46,500	\$400,000	\$1,956,569	\$0
Munster	2	\$397,500	\$980,100	\$397,500	\$0	\$6,293,241
NIRPC	12	\$987,653	\$1,005,497	\$1,110,536	\$1,120,460	\$550,000
Portage	5	\$2,492,240	\$6,651,852	\$11,250,000	\$2,756,741	\$0
Porter County	11	\$8,613,790	\$10,643,275	\$2,723,670	\$6,735,606	\$11,639
Schererville	3	\$669,734	\$75,000	\$669,734	\$10,248,384	\$12,599,069
St. John	1	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$699,208
Valparaiso	5	\$318,392	\$6,985,608	\$285,792	\$2,897,630	\$2,770,151
Winfield	2	\$0	\$0	\$592,300	\$126,000	\$0
<b>DNR</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>\$2,570,000</b>	<b>\$2,375,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>INDOT</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>\$160,571,029</b>	<b>\$157,116,897</b>	<b>\$274,358,382</b>	<b>\$215,272,150</b>	<b>\$82,025,496</b>
<b>E C Transit</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>\$1,442,278</b>	<b>\$990,515</b>	<b>\$1,001,209</b>	<b>\$1,012,224</b>	<b>\$987,918</b>
<b>GPTC</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>\$11,785,788</b>	<b>\$8,066,853</b>	<b>\$9,986,536</b>	<b>\$10,006,465</b>	<b>\$11,475,118</b>
<b>NICTD</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>\$303,600,824</b>	<b>\$32,805,316</b>	<b>\$33,390,316</b>	<b>\$32,124,316</b>	<b>\$47,394,370</b>
<b>North Township</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>\$598,440</b>	<b>\$648,750</b>	<b>\$652,570</b>	<b>\$656,575</b>	<b>\$671,900</b>
<b>OE</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>\$318,700</b>	<b>\$322,500</b>	<b>\$326,400</b>	<b>\$330,300</b>	<b>\$347,550</b>
<b>PCACS</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>	<b>\$390,000</b>	<b>\$530,000</b>	<b>\$390,000</b>	<b>\$535,000</b>
<b>SLCCS</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>\$1,021,878</b>	<b>\$1,110,078</b>	<b>\$1,287,582</b>	<b>\$1,309,318</b>	<b>\$1,079,923</b>
<b>Valparaiso Transit</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>\$7,920,875</b>	<b>\$3,730,875</b>	<b>\$4,380,875</b>	<b>\$4,380,875</b>	<b>\$3,391,432</b>
<b>MC Transit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>\$2,069,000</b>	<b>\$2,097,500</b>	<b>\$1,575,000</b>	<b>\$2,295,026</b>	<b>\$1,462,736</b>
<b>TransPorte (La Porte)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>\$723,200</b>	<b>\$971,664</b>	<b>\$698,357</b>	<b>\$914,324</b>	<b>\$629,290</b>

“The Commission serves as the catalyst for progress in Northwest Indiana. The ‘can do’ attitude is the key for proving nothing is impossible...”

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**George Toppol, NIRPC Chairman, 2021**

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## COMMISSION ACTIVITY

Due to Coronavirus, all meetings of the Commission were held remotely in 2021, and yet the Commission missed none of its responsibilities moving ahead regional business operating as the Council of Governments, Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Economic Development District (EDD) for Northwest Indiana.

The Commission continued to coordinate transportation planning and programming activities, managing approximately \$1.5 billion of transportation projects in its 4-year Transportation Improvement Program. Supporting transit throughout the region, the Commission continued purchasing buses and providing other funding on behalf of the region’s transit operators. The Commission also received presentations on the new Cline Avenue Bridge, built entirely with private funds; the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and its implication for future MPO funding; and early analyses of the results and implications of early data from the U.S. Census.

In order to address Northwest Indiana’s unique environmental challenges head-on, the Commission adopted *MOVE NWI* for congestion mitigation and received updates on the NWI Greenhouse Gas Inventory project with Indiana University. The Commission formally lent local community support to the federal designation of the proposed Calumet National Heritage Area, recognizing the historical and cultural uniqueness of the region.

Using funds made available by Congress through the CARES Act, the Commission directed funds for the creation of the *Recover NWI Regional Revolving Loan Fund* program to supplement pandemic recovery activities of the EDD.

The Commission also considered a presentation on reformulating and restructuring its committee structure that is intended to proceed in earnest in 2022.





Council of Governments

**COG**  
Council of Governments

The Council of Governments is a forum for municipalities in Lake, Porter, & La Porte counties to collaborate and discuss issues of common interest. The Commission is the COG for the region, and administers the MPO & EDD.

**NIRPC GOVERNANCE**

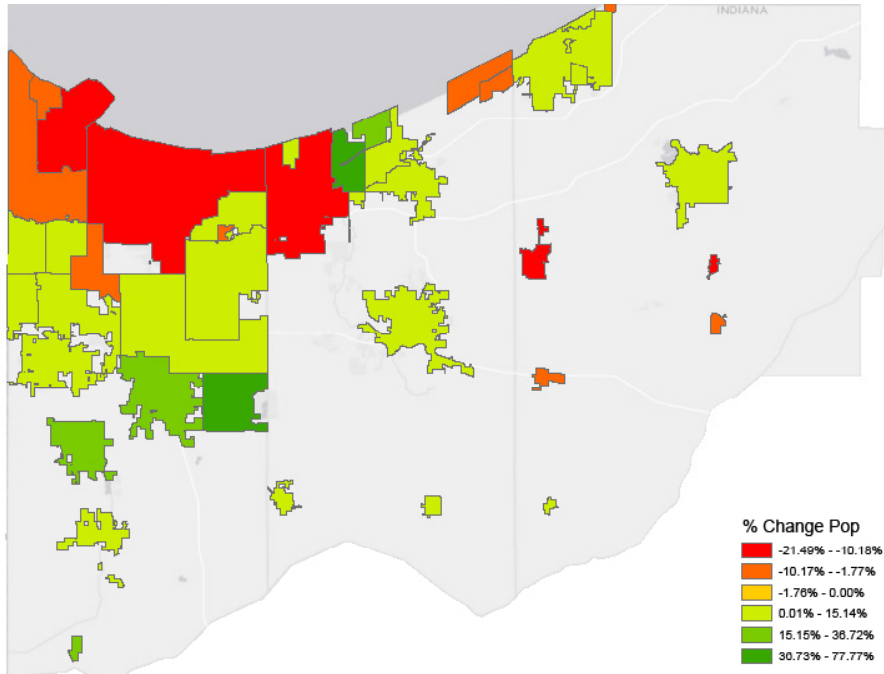
NIRPC provides a governmental forum that enables the citizens and elected officials in Northwest Indiana to address regional issues relating to transportation, the environment, and economic development. The Commission is a public body created by the Indiana General Assembly in 1965. The Commission consists of 53 commissioners, representing 41 communities and nearly 800,000 people. The Commission functions as the point of the political process where regional public policies are made into actionable plans and programs.

**STRUCTURE**

The Commission operates on a committee structure, covering work areas including transportation, land use, trails, environment, and other plans, programs, and projects of regional concern. The Commission or its Executive Board meets monthly.

Commissioners must be elected officials and are appointed by their respective governing bodies. One seat is reserved for an appointment by the Governor of the State of Indiana. Municipalities and commissioners benefit from Commission participation from collaboration on regional and local issues, deliverables for

## Data Modeling & Analysis

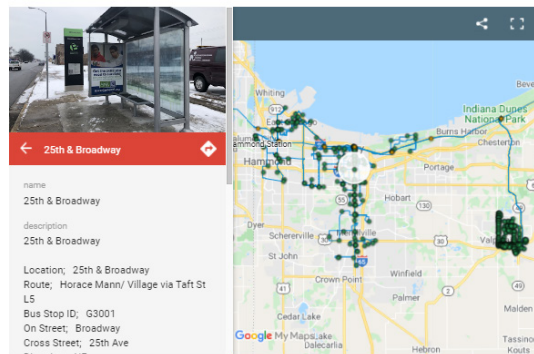


### SHIFTING POPULATIONS

Data modelers used 2020 US Census data to identify population shifts in Northwest Indiana. Models reflect areas for redevelopment of public services, like new and rerouted bus service and infrastructure improvements. Local governments can use this information to provide resources to residents living in environmental justice areas.

### NORTHWEST INDIANA ADA TRANSIT MAP

The Northwest Indiana ADA Transit Map is the first comprehensive inventory of all transit stops in Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties. The online map provides photos of the stop and information for commuters, such as access, neighboring routes, shelters, curb height, and amenities for those with disabilities.



#### Provided Transit Stop Information

By clicking on each of the stop locations on the map, one will be able to see:

#### Location Information

- The location of the transit stop
- The transit line route
- The Bus Stop ID used for MPOC internal reference

NIRPC produced best practice guidance and data services that help municipal officials, planners, engineers, and businesses to implement coordinated programs, common standards, and best use of land and resources for all residents. NIRPC provided data services for more than 14 external entities in 2021.

Municipalities implemented recommendations from the *Complete Streets* program that call for tree coverage, storm drainage, bike lanes, and improved pedestrian safety. Data analysts provided a model INDOT used to identify a more efficient traffic pattern on the Borman Expressway. Planners drafted an update to *Sensible Tools*, a set of best practices for effective, sustainable land planning.

# Guidance & Service

*Best Practices, Regional Studies, & Data Analysis*

## Best Practices & Studies

### TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD)



*Development surrounding transit stations, such as in downtown Hammond, are included in the TOD study.*

Economic development around stations along the NICTD Westlake commuter rail corridor and the South Shore Line double-track project will transform neighborhoods.

NIRPC initiated a study of these neighborhoods to evaluate and help municipalities qualify for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) funding opportunities. The TOD program identifies

municipalities most ready to begin with infrastructure plans, funding, and ability to begin construction.

NIRPC planners prepared general recommendations for Northwest Indiana municipalities that will strengthen applications. The studies identified infrastructure metrics like residential and commercial property balance, zoning, amenities, opportunities to improve station access, density,

and safety and walkability features. In 2022, NIRPC planners will assist municipalities to meet the criteria.

The TOD program will support new Transportation Development Districts (TDD), state designations that open local and state funding for economic development near transit stations.



# Environment

## ENVIRONMENT

The need for conservation, land reclamation and redevelopment, cleaner air quality, and the protection of Lake Michigan and Kankakee watersheds remains constant, even as land use, industry, traffic patterns, and daily life in Northwest Indiana shift each year.

NIRPC's strengths in environmental initiatives are technical expertise and the ability to function as a collaborative partner for municipalities and the private and public sectors. Throughout 2021, NIRPC planners administered and implemented environmental and natural resource projects such as the Greater NWI Brownfield Coalition Assessment Grant, the *Communitree* urban forestry program, local and regional greenhouse gas inventories, and environmental review of transportation construction projects. Partnerships helped complete the Lake County Prairie Restoration project and other conservation action plans. NIRPC additionally supported third-party programs, like grassroots environmental projects and a solar co-op program.

Tenets of the long-range plan, *NWI 2050*, direct NIRPC's environmental work. All programs, like air quality education and outreach, urban forestry, and brownfields must be justified within that framework. *Green Fleets Radio*, which serves the air quality outreach mandate, continues to broadcast on Lakeshore Public Radio, one result of our partnership with South Shore Clean Cities (now Drive Clean Indiana).

Environmental work is connected through several of NIRPC's mission responsibilities. NIRPC technical services provided GIS mapping support to the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership, a coalition of environmental conservation NGOs working to preserve and restore high-quality habitats in the region. In the past, programs like *Complete Streets* have addressed both environmental and transportation concerns, including street design, safety, pollution control, and urban forestry.

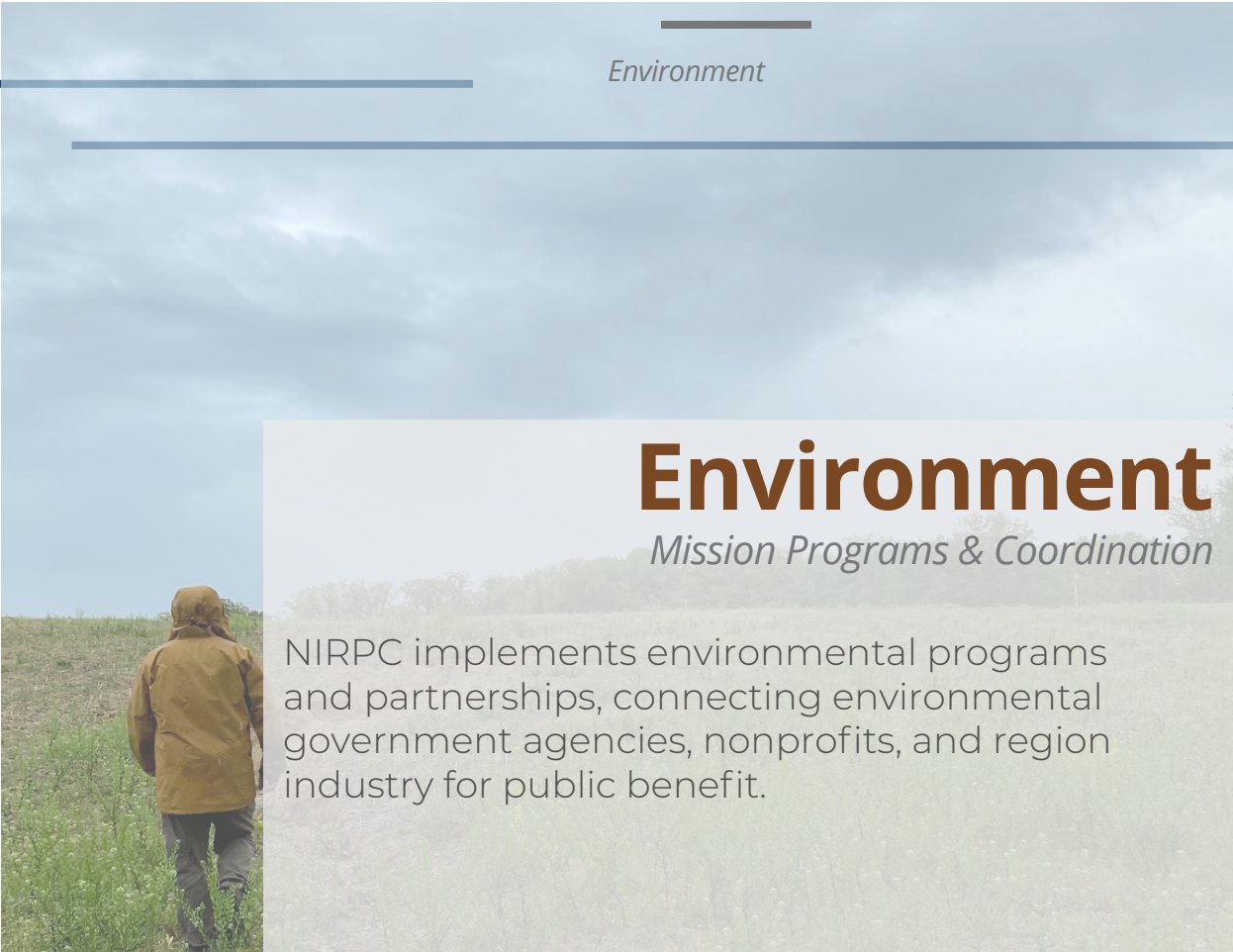
NIRPC's mission to collaborate regionally for environmental, transportation, and economic interests requires the agency to continually develop its unique role for conservation and sustainable environmental work in Northwest Indiana.





# Environment

*Mission Programs & Coordination*



NIRPC implements environmental programs and partnerships, connecting environmental government agencies, nonprofits, and region industry for public benefit.

“ I am most passionate about the NWI Brownfield Coalition... we’re seeing real progress at redeveloping long-vacant and underutilized properties back into usable parcels.”

**Kathy Luther, Director of Environmental Programs**

## LAKE COUNTY PRAIRIE RESTORATION

Farmland adjacent to Deep River County Park has been converted back to native prairie land through the *Lake County Prairie Restoration Program*, a partnership between NIRPC, Lake County Parks, and the EPA, under the Urban Waters Act. The project near Deep River covers 38 acres. Native seeds were planted in February of 2021. As the new prairie continues to grow, a small erosion area was corrected. The correction is expected to reduce pollution leading to Deep River and downstream to Lake George. Nearly 50 tons of sediment will be reduced, an important step to protect riverine fish habitat and reduce future dredging needs in Lake George.

## AIR QUALITY

NIRPC partners with South Shore Clean Cities (renamed Drive Clean Indiana in 2022) to provide air quality education services to the community. Northwest Indiana saw nine Air Quality Action Days in 2021. Six were due to soot particles from western wildfires. Air quality education is an action area within the long-range plan, *NWI 2050*.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE & TRANSPORTATION

*Communitree* purchased and distributed 345 trees in 12 jurisdictions. The program remains popular. NIRPC received a new \$124,000 grant from the US Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to continue the program in 2022.

Local transportation generated 54 early coordination project requests. Early Coordination is a process by which transportation project sponsors can request that environmental and natural resource regulatory agencies work together to facilitate project permit needs. NIRPC staff use regional knowledge and expertise to comment on evaluations of the environmental impacts of construction projects.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventories were developed for 13 municipalities. A Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory provides a baseline level of the pollution that causes climate change found within each jurisdiction. When compiled, this data provides both micro and macro views of Northwest Indiana's contribution to global climate change.

NIRPC partnered with Earth Charter Indiana to hire interns and garner technical support from the IU Environmental Resiliency Institute. The collective nature of the effort reduced costs for the surveyed municipalities by 50 percent. The inventories will be used in 2022 to create achievable and scientifically-based targets for greenhouse gas reductions in Northwest Indiana.

## BROWNFIELDS

NIRPC completed Phase I environmental assessments at five brownfield reclamation sites in Lake County in 2021. Brownfield assessments efforts supported redevelopment efforts on two long-vacant Gary school properties, a historic bank building in downtown Hammond, and two underutilized sites in East Chicago. All fall within environmental justice areas. NIRPC worked with the EPA, developers, and city officials to complete nine projects on these sites, with an additional three in progress. The majority of the \$600,000 EPA Brownfield Assessment grant has been allocated.

An inventory of brownfields along US Highway 6 in Porter County is underway on behalf of the Porter County Redevelopment Commission.

Brownfields are contaminated, underutilized, or otherwise undesirable properties that cannot be sold. Brownfields have often been dry cleaners, manufacturers and industry, and auto shops.

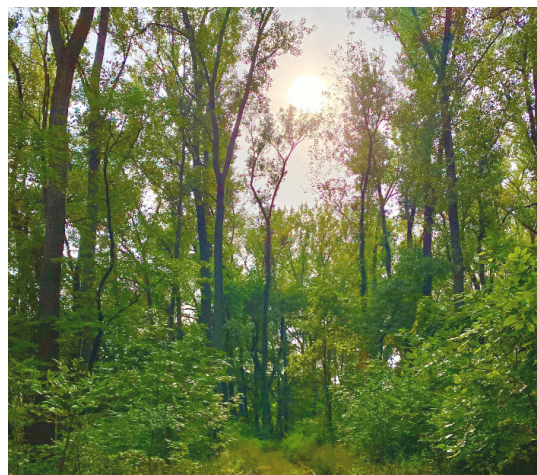
Reclamation returns brownfields to productive use through three phases:

Phase 1 is an environmental assessment to investigate likely contaminants, historic uses of

the property, or environmental circumstances. This process relieves liability from a buyer, making the property a more desirable purchase.

During Phase II, technicians collect samples and test for the contents of the soil and determine a course of action.

Phase III is cleanup implementation, to ensure safe economical reuse of contaminated properties.






## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NWI

### EDD

The Economic Development District (EDD) is a designation by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) that makes Lake, Porter, and La Porte counties eligible for critical EDA funding and assistance opportunities. The EDD was established in 2019 as a tool for private, public, and nonprofit organizations to work toward a coordinated strategy for economic development and collaborative regional economic planning.

### CEDS

The collective economic strategy plan is the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS outlines objectives that EDD staff use to guide applicants in the grant planning process. Project alignment with CEDS objectives is required for EDA grant approval. The CEDS also complements the collective goals of *Ignite the Region: A Regional Strategy for Economic Transformation*, led by the Northwest Indiana Forum.





The EDD status affords the communities and counties in NIRPC's territory with a unique opportunity to now compete for federal EDA funds to improve their local economies and supporting infrastructure.

**Denarie Kane, Economic Development District Coordinator**

## RLF: RECOVER NWI & LA PORTE COUNTY

The *Recover NWI* revolving loan program approved its first loan this year for \$100,000. Loan proceeds totaling \$50,000 in working capital and \$50,000 in direct purchases and services funded a Gary restaurant's new location. The EDA-sponsored program launched in July with \$530,000 from CARES Act funds. Loans of \$10,000 to \$100,000 are made to businesses and nonprofit organizations in the EDD region that

have been negatively impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Loan repayments are returned to the fund, making the program available for future businesses.

The *La Porte County RLF* loaned \$15,000 for a grocery store start-up in Michigan City.





## EDD

### Economic Development District

NIRPC administers the EDD designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration for Lake, Porter, & La Porte counties.

## COLLABORATIVE WORK

NIRPC led a coalition-supported grant application to the EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge. The proposal advanced the development of the Midwest Quantum Corridor, a 90-mile research, technology, and manufacturing corridor between Chicago and South Bend. High-tech infrastructure investments would allow companies to access technology to grow, retain, and create jobs within the EDD. The funding program was oversubscribed and NIRPC was not among the limited number of awardees from well over 500 proposals nationwide. However, the coalition's work laid

important groundwork for the Corridor and for future EDA funding opportunities.

In an initiative led by the Northwest Indiana Forum with the contributions of partners throughout the region that included NIRPC, greater Northwest Indiana was awarded \$50 million in a Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) grant award through the Indiana Economic Development Corporation. Included in this award are funds to assist the Marquette Greenway completion as well as to advance the Midwest Quantum Corridor initiative.

## ECONOMIC RECOVERY & RESILIENCY PLAN

The experiences of Northwest Indiana's businesses during the pandemic have spurred the development of an *Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan* for the region. The plan's purpose is to prepare the region for long-term economic resiliency during future economic hardship. The program is sponsored by the EDA and funded

through the 2020 CARES Act funds. A steering committee has been formed, and an economic development consultant hired. NIRPC has been assisting with the identification of stakeholders for future roundtable discussions and the gathering of information from communities.



# Staff Members



Talaya Jones



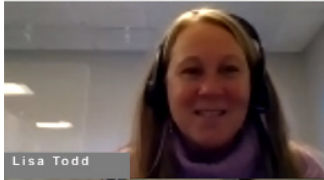
Marisol Manley



Kevin Polette



Meredith Stilwell



Lisa Todd



Charles Bradsky



Flor Baum



Kathy Luther



Denarie Kane



Tyson Warner



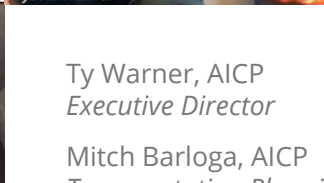
Mitch Barloga



Thomas C. Dow



Scott Weber



Mitch Barloga, AICP  
Transportation Planning  
Manager / Active  
Transportation Planner



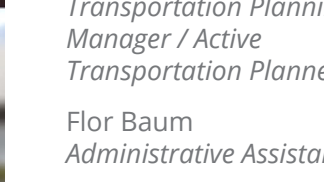
Lucas Ecklund-Baker



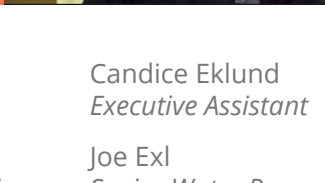
Stephanie Kuziela



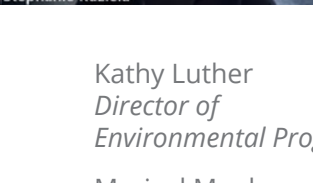
Scott Weber



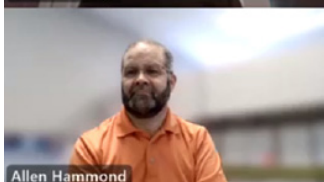
Flor Baum  
Administrative Assistant



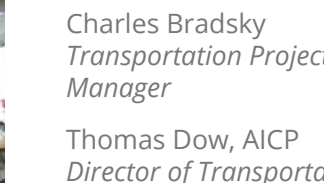
Candice Eklund  
Executive Assistant



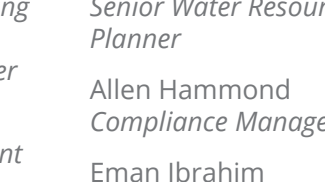
Kathy Luther  
Director of  
Environmental Programs



Allen Hammond



Charles Bradsky  
Transportation Projects  
Manager



Joe Exl  
Senior Water Resources  
Planner



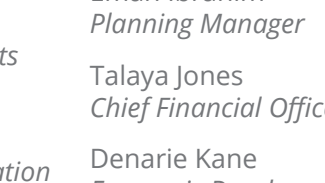
Marisol Manley  
Accounts Payable Clerk



Candice Eklund



Lucas Ecklund-Baker  
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Specialist



Allen Hammond  
Compliance Manager



Kevin Polette  
Technical Assistant



Peter Kimball



Joe Exl



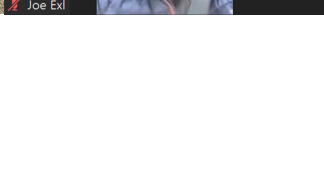
Eman Ibrahim  
Planning Manager



Matthew Paskash  
Economic Development  
Specialist



Joe Exl



Denarie Kane  
Economic Development  
Coordinator



Meredith Stilwell  
Office Manager / Website  
Coordinator



Joe Exl



Stephanie Kuziela  
Accountant



Scott Weber  
Transportation Planner /  
Analyst



Joe Exl



Joe Exl



Joe Exl

# PeopleNIRPC

## Commissioners

### Executive Board

George Topoll	<i>Chairman</i>	Bill Emerson, Jr.	
Justin Kiel	<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	Wendy Mis	
Richard Hardaway	<i>Secretary</i>	Tom Dermody	
Greg Stinson	<i>Treasurer</i>	Sheila Matias	
Michael Griffin	<i>Immediate Past Chair</i>	Sue Lynch	
		James G. Ton	
		Jim Pressel	<i>Governor's Appointee</i>

### Lake County

Kyle W. Allen, Sr.	<i>Lake County Commission</i>	Tom McDermott	<i>Hammond</i>
Charlie Brown	<i>Lake County Council</i>	Wendy Mis	<i>Munster</i>
Robert Carnahan	<i>Cedar Lake</i>	Jerome Prince	<i>Gary</i>
Bill Carroll	<i>Lake Station</i>	Rick Ryfa	<i>Griffith</i>
Anthony Copeland	<i>East Chicago</i>	Tom Schmitt	<i>Schererville</i>
Jon Derwinski	<i>Winfield</i>	Brian Snedecor	<i>Hobart</i>
Daina Dumbrys	<i>Michiana Shores</i>	Steve Spebar	<i>Whiting</i>
Bill Emerson, Jr.	<i>Lake County Surveyor</i>	Gerald Swets	<i>St. John</i>
Michael Griffin	<i>Highland</i>	Sharon Szwedo	<i>New Chicago</i>
Richard Hardaway	<i>Merrillville</i>	Mary Tanis	<i>Dyer</i>
Jack Jeralds	<i>Schneider</i>	John Yelkich	<i>Lowell</i>
Andrew Kyres	<i>Crown Point</i>		

### Porter County

Jeannette Bapst	<i>Dune Acres</i>	Matt Murphy	<i>Valparaiso</i>
Geof Benson	<i>Beverly Shores</i>	David Peeler	<i>Hebron</i>
Jim Biggs	<i>Porter County Commission</i>	Bob Poparad	<i>Porter County Council</i>
Kevin Breitzke	<i>Porter County Surveyor</i>	Greg Stinson	<i>Porter</i>
Robert Forster	<i>Kouts</i>	James G. Ton	<i>Chesterton</i>
Eric Hull	<i>Burns Harbor</i>	George Topoll	<i>Union Township</i>
Sue Lynch	<i>Portage</i>	Vacant	<i>Ogden Dunes</i>
Edward Morales	<i>Porter Township</i>	Vacant	<i>Pines</i>

### La Porte County

Duane Arndt	<i>Kingsford Heights</i>	Sheila Matias	<i>La Porte County Commission</i>
Janet Beck	<i>Pottawattomie Park</i>		<i>Westville</i>
Joshleen Denham	<i>Trail Creek</i>	Lori Mercer	<i>La Porte County Council</i>
Tom Dermody	<i>La Porte</i>	Mike Mollenhauer	<i>Michigan City</i>
Denise Ebert	<i>Wanatah</i>	Duane Parry	<i>Kingsbury</i>
Tony Hendricks	<i>La Porte County Surveyor</i>	Vacant	
Justin Kiel	<i>La Crosse</i>		
Robert Lemay	<i>Long Beach</i>		

