

NIRPC PUBLIC HEARING
WICKER MEMORIAL PARK SOCIAL CENTER
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>> TY WARNER: Thank you all for coming. We're waiting for a few more people to come in the room, Frank Myrvan from the Township. We'll get started in 30 seconds or so.

[Pause.]

I think we're ready to start if you're wherever you need to be to be comfortable, we'll get going here today. Okay. Thank you.

First of all, I apologize for the weather today. I know it's hard to get around places in Northwest Indiana. Cold weather doesn't make it any more fun. I appreciate you being here and making an effort to come. It also says a lot about your commitment to public transportation that you made the effort to get in this room. We greatly appreciate it. And we're looking forward to a great discussion and hopefully to improve transit in Northwest Indiana.

I don't think I said it before, but I am Ty Warner. I am Executive Director of the Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission or NIRPC. And let me just talk about what we're doing today, and I'm going to very quickly get it to Frank Myrvan, Jr., who is the

Township Trustee who owns this facility.

So this whole meeting today came out of settlement talks that we had with the group Everybody Counts in regards to a legal action. NIRPC agreed to have this meeting, and we thought that it would be a good idea to be able to hopefully get some productive discussion on transportation issues in Northwest Indiana as well as hopefully an educational time, as well, about how transit gets funded, how it works, how things -- the challenges that transit has in Northwest Indiana. So we're looking forward to a good discussion.

I'm going to turn it over to Frank, and Frank will turn it back to me; and I'll give you a brief background on NIRPC, Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, what it is and what it does. And then I will turn it over to Belinda Petroskey, also Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission staff, how it's funded, what it covers, how it works here. And after that, I believe there will be another statement that will be made from Everybody Counts and then Steve Walsh from Lakeshore Public Media will take it from there for the rest of the meeting. So that's the format of this

discussion.

Something else I want to be sure to say is that there is a court reporter here that is taking a transcript of this meeting. And there's also a videographer who is videotaping the meeting. Both the video and the transcript will be available on the NIRPC website as soon as we have them available to post. And that will be there. There will be a PowerPoint that Belinda will be using. She'll be talking about everything on the slides that she's using. That PowerPoint will also be in our website. If it's not already posted, it will be there very shortly. So with that, let me turn it over to Frank Myrvan.

>> FRANK MYRVAN: I like to speak without the microphone if I could. First, I'd like to welcome you to Wicker Park, of which I don't own; the taxpayers own it. And it's the North Township Trustee Office that runs it. And I want to make that perfectly clear for when we start.

So my welcoming remarks is I'd like to give a state of the state of Dial-a-Ride. So North Township Trustee Office offers Dial-a-Ride, which is one of the last

transportation systems standing in Lake County, and it's an on-demand service. So I'm going to walk you through what we do.

So in 2012, we gave 12,000 rides, the RBA went under -- and first I want to say I'm not a Johnny-come-lately when it comes to transportation. So when we met in Hammond at the Civic Center, I was there and we talked about the options for transportation to continue. I've learned a lot about transportation as quickly as I possibly can.

So what I want to say is now in 2014, after we received the CMAC grant from the Federal Government, which is carbon monoxide reduction grant, our ridership has gone to almost 48,000 rides at the end of this year. So we tripled or quadrupled the amount of rides that we've been able to provide.

And how we've done that, how we've been able to do that is we partnered with AAA to handle our overflow. We purchased a couple more buses that we're waiting for, but we've tried to make ourselves more efficient to get more buses on the road. We privatized our dispatch so that we could handle the call volume

because we had a 1960s way of answering the phone. And at the Township, we also have other services that we provide. So it was almost too much to handle. So we privatized that with Prompt to be able to handle the call volume. The bottom line is: There's a need. That's what that statistic from 12,000 to 48,000 I'm trying to impress upon you, is that there's a need for public transportation.

And how we've handled it is every person who calls, we try to provide a ride for. How difficult that may be and how soon we may run out of the money, what we're trying to do is fill the need. And that's what the CMAC grant is designed to do. You take a transportation system, you utilize it, and you prove to the local economy and to the local government that there's a need and you could do it efficiently and effectively.

The other aspect of what we're trying to do with Dial-a-Ride is bundle more riders on the buses so we can bring down the cost per ride to be able to extend the amount of rides that we can give over the next year. And we also are looking at the option of having

to charge a fee, a dollar to be able to, when we go for funding, be able to say there is skin in the game. We charge \$2.

All of that is what we're doing now. So what we have to ask ourselves is: Where do we see public transportation in five years?

And I understand the gist of this meeting and what it's about, and I'm going to get to that point; but what we have to do is going forward, we have to figure out and have a plan what we're going to do for public transportation.

GPTC and the City of Gary is one of the last fixed routes left in Lake County. North Township, South Lake and EEOC out of Portage and out of South County are the last transportation systems standing.

We have to be able to figure out a system that is a hybrid that, one, there's a political will for people to implement; two, that we could absolutely positively find an efficient and economic way to pay for it and be able to find the funding source so that people are able to get rides.

What we have proven in North Township is that

there's a need. And that's what the CMAC grant has done. So now what we have to do is provide a product that shows elected officials and the public that there is efficacy and that we are efficient in what we are doing. And we have to be able to do that by showing them and not telling them. And that's what we're trying to do.

We've brought in private companies. We've tried to maximize every penny that we've had. We're charging a fee. We're trying to lower per-cost rides. And that's what we're doing on a daily basis.

So the point of this meeting today is not only -- in very simple terms, it's equal access and equal opportunity. What the world needs to know is that transportation, buses, provide equal access and equal opportunity for people. It's a very simple formula. It is also a bridge of economic development. So businesses are growing in South County. That's how workers from Ivy Tech, from East Chicago, Hammond and Whiting get to those jobs. If they can't afford a car and they're just starting off, the sustainability of those jobs is public transportation.

So we have a tremendous opportunity that we have to capitalize on and say: Where are we going in five years? It's our responsibility as far as the leaders, the North Township Trustee Office, GPTC, NIRPC, Everybody Counts, we have to be able to work together to find a product that people want to invest in so that we can provide transportation for each other.

A very long story, short. I was in the City of Gary. Ms. Torres was talking and giving a speech. The one thing that I walked away from is I had a friend who I knew who I knew was like Raymond Fletcher, moved to Las Vegas. We would correspond quite frequently. He was a paraplegic in a wheelchair. All he ever wanted was an equal opportunity. He moved to Las Vegas for a lot of different reasons, but one of them was because of public transportation and to have the ability to be mobile.

So that's why we're here today. There's got to be an understanding from all sides. The providers have to be able to provide a product that people trust, is efficient and effective and dependable, and the riders have to understand that we're doing everything we can,

and Everybody Counts has to take into account the parameters in which we have to work in and doing the best that we can.

I believe in my heart and soul that everyone wants to find that common ground. Now, there are a lot of barriers to overcome. But the fact of the matter is that I get that you want equal opportunity, and you want the ability to be mobile in your world. It's not a privilege; it's a right. I get that.

Mr. Fletcher was in a wheelchair. And when people would see him show up at the store or the meetings, he didn't want accolades because he did that. He just wanted to be normal. He wanted to live his life and be able to go to the store. He would call us for rides. This is reality: To be able to go to a political or government function and call Dial-a-Ride. It would be after hours, but we would find a way to get him there. We would call Chip before we had a contract and ask them to get him a ride.

But the fact is: What's the difference between me having equal access and go to that meeting and Raymond Fletcher? Well, the difference is he's dependent upon

public transportation. And so the subject is bigger than this room. It's bigger than this park and it's bigger than this county, and we have got to provide leadership to be able to provide reasonable and efficient ways to show the taxpayers how public transit should be run and break all those borders down.

So I hope that today is productive. My hope is that your situation and your issues are understood and absorbed. This isn't a meeting about empathy. It's a meeting about moving forward. And it's really about finding a common source and a commonality on how to continue or how to start the best way to provide public transportation in our county.

And I'm going to get on the soap box. Every thriving economy in America has public transportation. And it's long overdue that Lake County does not get on the road or the path of putting together a public transportation system that provides rides, bridges economic development and creates, uplifts people to be able to get jobs so they're self-sustaining. Long overdue. So we must find a way to do that.

[Applause.]

I thank you all very much. And I will be here all day to be able to listen to the comments. I'll be here tonight. But the main point that I also want you to walk away from is: Allow this meeting to be a springboard to better things. And everyone conduct themselves -- on NIRPC's side of things, we have new leadership, and there's new beginnings. I believe in my heart and soul that Ty Warner wants to put things together that provides transportation. He's a new guy that deserves the benefit of the doubt that new beginnings have started and we're moving in that direction. So I hope we work together to be able to provide that. I thank you very much. Ty Warner?

[Applause.]

>> TY WARNER: Thank you very much, Frank. Let me give you some background to NIRPC so you understand just organizationally what NIRPC is if you're not already familiar with the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission. And then as I said I'll turn it over to Belinda to talk more specifically about transit. The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission is the Council of Governance for

Northwestern Indiana. That's first and foremost. That means that all 41 municipalities --

>> Sir, can you talk a little louder, please?

>> TY WARNER: NIRPC is the Council of Governments for Northwestern Indiana. All 41 municipalities, all three counties belong to NIRPC. They come to the table at least once a month to talk about issues that are bigger than any one of them. That's really what it is about. It was formed initially in 1965 and has gone on from there. But in addition to the Council of Governance function, it also is the MPO for Northwest Indiana, Metropolitan Planning Organization. That is a common goal that is common across this county. Any population that's greater than 50,000 in urbanized area has an MPO by law. The function of that MPO, in simpler terms, is to be able to access Federal funds and pull Federal funds to the local level where local decisionmakers decide how those funds are spent.

It's important to understand that the NIRPC Board is made up of your elected officials, the folks that you elect to represent you at that Board. Every community that sends somebody as a representative to

NIRPC is elected by their community. And many cases it's the mayors -- not always -- but the mayors and counties and even the county surveyors. There's two Townships and a Governor appointee. They all are making up the NIRPC Board, which is composed of 53 members. You have elected representatives on the NIRPC Board that actually are NIRPC. That is what NIRPC is, is the composition of those officials from those respective communities.

One thing about with the MPO, as I mentioned with Federal funds, as I've been out talking around the area, one thing I understand is a common misperception is that the MPO is somehow sitting on a pile of cash and just deciding how those funds get decided, and that's not the way it works. NIRPC is a governmental entity that has access to Federal funds; but to be able to use those Federal funds on the local level, there has to be a local match. There has to be local money generated from local sources to be able to match those Federal dollars and gain access to those funds.

So we help do that. But it's not as if we have some massive amount of cash that just comes to us

automatically. It's a matter of accessing those funds.

That said, transit falls into that picture and how transit gets funded.

So at this point I'm going to turn it over to Belinda, wherever Belinda went, to be able to describe how this works in a bit more detail.

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: Thank you. Let me get out of the way here. Thank you. We're just going to take a few minutes and kind of do a Transit 101 crash course here without boring anybody.

Okay. There are two roles NIRPC plays in public transit. One of them is what's called our MPO role. It stands for Metropolitan Planning Organization. That's creation of the Federal Government. Agencies like ours now exist all across the country. And we are responsible for doing that list of things, a long-range transportation plan that has to include regional goals and objectives, priorities, expansion plans and then a short-range plan which then implements that long-range plan. And out of that comes criteria and our project programming and selection process.

The next major role we play is kind of unusual for

MPOs. We were asked a number of years ago by the Federal Transit Administration to take on the role as Grantee on behalf of small human services agencies that were providing public transit -- rather than having multiple small agencies filing applications, they asked NIRPC to do that.

So we now do that on behalf of a total of seven transit operators in Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties that calls for us to perform administrative oversight of the seven for compliance with Federal rules and regulations. We receive and pass through Federal funds for the seven. And we submit an annual grant application, or applications, conduct financial oversight and do the quarterly reporting process for them.

Public transit funding. Basically three sources. There can be more. But basically local support being the most important. Without it, we don't get the other two. Local support comes from a variety of sources, including fares, municipal property taxes, other Federal programs, County Economic Development Income Tax and county property taxes.

State support is generated from a very small portion of the sales tax dedicated to public transit. And then there is a similar commuter rail fund that only NICTD is eligible for that is also a small portion of sales tax.

And then the Federal support, by far and away the majority of which is done under what they call the Section 5307 program.

Types of transit. There are multiple types of transit. In Northwest Indiana, we have basically four: Fixed route, which is established routes, stops and fares; complementary paratransit, and it's required of fixed route systems, riders must qualify and register for the service; demand response service, that may be either available to the general public or it can be special services for elderly and disabled, and its fares and hours are set by the respective operators; and then commuter and passenger rail.

The existing operators in Northwest Indiana, the direct recipients, that means these three operators get their funding directly from FTA. We do not do the grants on their behalf. That's the Gary Public

Transportation Corporation, GPTC, Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, or NICTD. That's the South Shore. And then Michigan City transit.

This list of operators is the seven that comprise NIRPC's subgrantees or subrecipients. And they are East Chicago Transit, North Township Dial-a-Ride, South County Community Services, Opportunity Enterprises, Porter County Aging and Community Services, Valparaiso Transit and LaPorte TransPorte.

The next couple of charts I did to show you how the fiscal year 2014 Section 5307 money was used in Lake and Porter County. They get one set of funds; and then Michigan City and LaPorte, because they're a small urban area, they have another set of funds that just they qualify for.

So there's the numbers for '14. And that really is their basic maintenance of operations money called Operating, Preventive Maintenance and Capital.

In Lake County, GPTC got a little over \$5 million; NICTD, the South Shore, gets about 3-1/2 million; South Lake Community Services about a half million; and North Township Dial-a-Ride, 181,000.

The Porter County operators -- Porter County operators, Valpo at 695,000; Porter County Aging and Community Services, a little over 300,000; and Opportunity Enterprises at 215,000.

We get between 10-1/2, \$11-1/2 million every year in that 5307 fund.

The transit operators are the ones who meet and program out that money with selecting projects based on criteria and priorities. And then that list of projects goes out to the public for review and comment.

And then we're showing in these pie charts how dependent each operator or the groups of operators, types of operators are on the different funding sources.

The first slide is the 2012 fixed route and complementary paratransit pie chart. The Federal was 44% of their support that year. The local match was 40%. And the state was 16%.

For 2013, you saw a little bit of a shift. Federal went to 52%, local 32%, and state stayed about even at 16%.

For the demand response services in 2012, Federal

Government was 21% of their operating costs. The state was 22%. And local funding subsidizes at the rate of 57% in Porter County.

In 2013, the demand response operators, I'm sorry, demand response operators 28% was Federal, state 31% and local went down to 41%.

I have ridership numbers up there for 2013 and 2014 just to show how we're doing. And without reading every number, they are very stable, for the most part. NICTD went down about 60,000. GPTC went up almost 100,000. East Chicago went up about 10, 13,000, and Valpo went up about 30,000. OE went up 5,000 from '12 to '13. Southlake County went down about 5,000. North Township, you see that huge increase that Frank talked about from 10,000 all the way up to almost 33,000. And Porter County Aging and Community Services went down slightly from '12 to '13.

In Michigan City and LaPorte, Michigan City did well, going up a little bit over 20,000 and LaPorte's hanging in there at 1200 up. You see the total up for all the bus and demand response, we're about 1300 -- I'm sorry, 1,340,000 NICTD is the 3.6 million. And for

'13 the total bus demand response went to 1,442,000. So we're picking up there. And NICTD went down just a little bit.

So it's fairly stable. With the availability of support now at this level, we're able to maintain at least what we're doing, what each is doing.

Where is it available? Very quickly. LaPorte County, Michigan City's fixed route and then the City of LaPorte is TransPorte is a demand response operation. Porter County transit. You see the fixed route in the center is Valpo. And then they have a route up to the South Shore station. They run on the weekends. And then in the insert you can see that we have the hash marks in the color, that means that demand response is available county-wide from the two agencies, OE and Porter County.

This is Lake County fixed route. Transit -- a little hard to see -- but showing where the fixed route services are for GPTC and East Chicago. And that's, of course, primarily in the north end of the county down to Crown Point with GPTC's Broadway Express.

For public demand response and paratransit, the

blue in about two-thirds of the county is the service area for Southlake County. They go everywhere except Gary and North Township, and that's because of the availability of a great deal of service in Gary and North Township when you look at the complementary paratransit area. That's where this darker area is. That's a requirement, to provide that transit within 3/4 of a mile of a fixed route. So when you add all that up, there's a substantial amount of transit in that area.

I thank you. This is our contact information, which I think we have available on cards -- or not. Our email address is nirpc@nirpc.org. Our telephone, 219-763-6060 or you can also dial us on 711. And then the U.S. postal service, our address, 6100 Southport Road, Portage Indiana, 46368. We are online at www.NIRPC.org, [Facebook.com/NIRPCMPO](https://www.facebook.com/NIRPCMPO) and [Twitter.com/NIRPC](https://twitter.com/NIRPC). And I thank you.

[Applause.]

>> TY WARNER: Yeah, the PowerPoint, as I mentioned, is available online. There were numbers on there that if you want to absorb and look in greater

detail. I know that probably generated a lot of questions.

When Steve Walsh comes up very shortly, he'll not only recognize folks in the room, but he'll get right to your questions and all.

But before we do that, my understanding is that Everybody Counts had wanted to make a statement of some sort, is that correct? Ms. Torres? Can I hand you the microphone?

>> THERESA TORRES: Sure. Thank you. Okay. Can't tell with my hearing, is it working? It's not my thing, but okay. Yeah, we wanted to get a few things clear. There's some misinformation out there. And we think it's important, too, for you to know a little bit of the history about how we happened to be here today. For those that don't know.

Everybody Counts is an advocacy agency. We've been notified by the Federal Government to help this community for 25 years. We're extremely proud of the positive relationships we've built within the community. We also take very great pride in anything we're involved with directly.

And I know there have been some press releases out there and some people are under the impression that we were co-sponsoring, co-hosting, co-organizing this event; and that's absolutely incorrect. There are a lot of things we would have done differently. Everyone approaches things in a different way. But the way that we would have organized the information for the audience, among other things, would have been very, very different.

So quick history. About 20 years ago we started getting a lot of calls from local residents who were having difficulties with the transit systems, the fragmented transit systems in Lake County. We undertook efforts to get the local decisionmakers to recognize that those people that had the problems, those people who were directly impacted needed to be involved in the planning process. And we also tried to convey the fact that the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA, was extremely important, compliance with that Act. And that lawsuit is the reason that we're here together today.

It's important to note that next year the ADA will

be 25 years old.

[Applause.]

And so we think it's high time to comply with that.

Now, I also wanted to acknowledge, some of the individuals who were willing to put their names -- when you file a class action lawsuit, there have to be individuals who are willing to put their names on the dotted line. And sometimes that could be a real scary thing. I'm sure you could understand that. Some of the individuals who were willing to do that paid a pretty high price for their bravery, and sadly several of them have died waiting for a resolution and they can't be here today. So I wanted their presence to be recognized.

None of our efforts on behalf of citizens with disabilities would have been possible without the incredible amount of support that we have received on a pro bono -- for y'all that don't know that, that's freebies -- from our legal team at Jenner & Block. We wanted to thank our attorney, your attorney, Mr. Steve Cyrus, for his unflagging commitment to our cause. Thank you.

[Applause.]

While our primary goal in filing that class action lawsuit was compliance with the ADA - and, sadly, up until this moment, the ADA hasn't even been mentioned. It's kind of an important component of what we're talking about today.

We also hoped to get the local transit providers, decisionmakers, funders, to recognize that the people who need public transit just might have some good ideas about the public transportation system, and that they needed to be a part of the process.

The good news is that Gary Public Transit Corporation, East Chicago Public Transit and, of course, the North Township Trustees Dial-a-Ride service have fully embraced that concept of working with the people and working together. For the last two years, they've been sitting there at the table with people who actually use public transit, treating them with respect, as equals. And they have proven that true collaboration can happen in Northwest Indiana.

The bad news is that it hasn't changed very much with some other folks. I sincerely hope that

Mr. Myrvan's predictions bode well for the future.

Everybody Counts -- none of us here representing Everybody Counts will apologize for being labeled as troublemakers. You might have heard that. We will continue to tell the people of Northwest Indiana that they no longer have to settle for business as usual.

Now, as Frederick Douglass said many years ago, without power -- without struggle, there could be no progress because power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will.

We prefer to work collaboratively. That's the way we have always approached the topic. However, if that doesn't work, we're willing to do what it takes.

Some say that things will never change; but, folks, here in Northwest Indiana, it's time that they do change.

[Applause.]

And I'll stop. We know you have important things to say today. We encourage you to share your thoughts, your ideas, your needs and your dreams. Be not afraid to say when you don't understand something. Sometimes when things are put out there in terms you don't

understand, it can be very intimidating. This is not the day to let that intimidate you because you are the real stakeholders in this process. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Is anybody going to introduce you?

>> TY WARNER: With that, Steve Walsh has graciously agreed to facilitate this conversation. I think many of you know Steve from Lakeshore Public Media. And so Steve is here to my left. So with that, Steve, I'm going to give it over to you.

>> STEVE WALSH: Thanks a lot, Ty.

I'm Steve Walsh with Lakeshore Public Radio. I'm a journalist. I also host the daily public affairs program on Lakeshore Public Radio called Regionally Speaking. I'll hold the microphone closer so everybody can hear. I want to put in a plug. At 4:00, we're going to be recording my radio show to air tomorrow at 1:00 on Lakeshore Public Radio. So if you have a chance to stick around, we might be able to get you on air.

Other than that, I'm going to try to keep as light a hand on this as humanly possible. There are some

basic ground rules that everyone has agreed upon. Everyone should stick to about three minutes. But, really, the whole idea is that everybody at least gets a chance to speak once during this session. There will be another session starting at 5 o'clock. Other than that, that's pretty much what we're trying to do here.

So who -- Theresa?

>> THERESA TORRES: Were you going to acknowledge the folks from the transit systems that are here in the room? I started to do that, but I figured you would.

>> STEVE HANLON: David Wright is right there. Who are the folks from the different transit systems here? Stand on up.

[Applause.]

Go ahead.

>> David Wright, Gary Public Transit.

>> Could everybody speak a little louder?

>> Francisco Rosado, Jr. from East Chicago Transit.

>> George Neil, Gary Transit.

>> STEVE WALSH: Second row here?

>> Taylor, City of Valparaiso.

>> Bruce Lender, Porter County Aging and Community

Services.

>> Chip Whitney, AAA Express.

>> Jerry, North Township Dial-a-Ride.

>> Jamie Rows, North Township Dial-a-Ride.

>> STEVE WALSH: Did we catch everybody? Nope, not yet? Excellent.

>> Claudia Taylor, Opportunity Enterprises, Valparaiso.

>> Mark, South Lake County Community Services.

>> I'm sorry. I didn't hear who you are.

>> Mark, South Lake County Community Services.

>> Thank you.

>> Tom McLenin, TransPorte.

>> STEVE WALSH: All the way from LaPorte. I see the Mayor back here, Mayor Snedecor here. You're Chairman of NIRPC, aren't you?

>> MAYOR SNEDECOR: Yes. Two more months.

>> STEVE WALSH: Two long, long months.

>> Joe Simonetto from Munster, NIRPC Board member, Munster Town Council.

>> STEVE WALSH: Have we covered everybody in here?

>> TY WARNER: NIRPC staff. Belinda Petroskey.

Steven. Allen Hammond is the possessor of the other microphone roaming around the room. And, again, I'm Ty Warner, Executive Director from NIRPC.

>> Kathleen also from NIRPC staff who just joined us fairly recently.

>> STEVE WALSH: I know some of you have been to public hearings where all they do is you get up and say your peace and move on to the next session. NIRPC has agreed that if they can answer the question, if it's something that's in their purview, that they will answer questions. You might be able to get an answer to some of those questions.

Again, though, stay roughly within those three minutes because we have a lot of people here. We want to get to all of them. We'll start by raising hands here. If at any time I'm not speaking loudly enough, which I'm not typically, point it out.

>> My name is Patricia Hawthorn -- and I've been a 22-year resident of Hammond, Indiana. When I first moved here in 1992, they had a bus route. Three years ago they discontinued it, and the Hammond residents need fixed route back again because I have a disabled

son and he likes to be independent. He don't like to wait for nobody. He want to go from Point A to Point B. And they should restore the Hammond public transit because it is really needed from Point A to Point B because if they don't restore it in Hammond to go from Point A to Point B, I'm going to be moving to Chicago, Illinois, where they run transit 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including holidays.

>> CLEMENT RICHMOND: Hello, everyone. My name is Clement Richmond. I'm a Gary resident. Just to kind of piggyback on what the lady said here, I don't know if it's true, but if it is true, I hear that Mayor McDermott said that he doesn't feel that it's necessary for Hammond residents to have -- or something, I'm kind of paraphrasing it -- but bottom line, I heard that he was against it. I don't see him present here. So I mean that sends a message, too.

Then here we are, we have the No. 24 and the No. 12, you know, going to Sibley in the morning. And we don't see anybody speaking up, you know, in the government aside of Hammond, Indiana. And my understanding is he doesn't want to get involved in

helping in any form, shape or fashion. That sends a bad message to us as Gary residents and anybody that's in the surrounding communities within Hammond.

So I think she's right. I think that's completely wrong, completely out of order. When you are up there making a six-figure salary and you're telling us, the people who are living from paycheck to paycheck and not making money hand over fist, that we actually don't need it, I can't believe that he would have the audacity to say that, and that's flat out wrong.

>> STEVE WALSH: I think this is covered by all the other speakers, but the ground rules for this are twofold. One of them is how's the service right now? Such as it is. What are your thoughts in that current service? What do you think should be done? What do you think the future of public transit look like in Northwest Indiana?

>> JOSEPH CUNNINGHAM: We need to stop. We need to stop with all these fractions and transit that we have and create a regional transit system.

[Applause.]

This is what we need. This is not only what Gary

needs, Porter County needs. We need to go -- my children -- my name is Joseph Cunningham. I've been resident of Gary, Indiana, all my life. I have two small children. This is something that's going to affect their life. I have a two-year-old and a seven-year-old. It's going to affect their life for the next 40 years on the decisions that NIRPC makes here today.

We need a regional transit system service that goes all throughout the county. So if I get up in the morning and I decide I can't reach Dial-a-Ride, I know that I can get on a bus and go anywhere I want to go without worrying about people like Chip. Dial-a-Ride may be a good idea, but it's not for everybody. We need, once again, a regional service.

Now, if we got the regional service, where should it be? Well, let's say who has the most buses? Who has the most drivers? Naturally, Gary, Indiana. That should be the hub.

We should think bigger than this. We shouldn't fraction the people and make them go here and there and maybe we can get a ride -- or it's at the discretion of

a person. Not your decision, but the delight and discretion of another person to decide if you can ride in his Dial-a-Ride or ride in his transit service.

>> STEVE WALSH: Do you use the service right now?

>> JOSEPH CUNNINGHAM: I use the service. I have COPD. I have cancer. I won't go on about my elements. I will talk about the fact of what they need here in this region.

I'm not just talking about Gary. We need to be able to go anywhere we want to go, any time we want to go.

[Applause.]

You understand that? Does NIRPC get it? Do you get it, NIRPC?

>> Take it to a courthouse.

>> JOSEPH CUNNINGHAM: Also, NIRPC, I just want to inform you that the next time you have a meeting, inform not only your stakeholders, but all of those people who are disabled, blind and people who are poor, people who ride the bus. We're the ones that ride the bus. Rich people don't ride the buses. They get in their cars, 50 and 40,000 cars and driveway.

Should we wait for a bus for an hour? But if we had mass transit throughout the county, every bus should be rolling every 15, 20 minutes to a stop. We should have enough buses to supply everybody who wants to get on the bus any time day or night. The buses should be running at least until 9:00.

Do you realize how many people have been put out of their jobs because the buses stopped at 5 o'clock in Gary? On Saturdays, when people work, or they stop at 7:00?

Or people can't go to church on Sundays because there are no buses. There should be buses rolling every day 24/7.

>> STEVE WALSH: Which one do you use? Gary?

>> JOSEPH CUNNINGHAM: I use Gary Public Transit. But the reason I use Gary Public Transit is it doesn't hook up with other transit services around the county. There are other places I like to go and not have to pay money out of my pocket to go there. I should be able to pay -- I'm a senior citizen. I'm 64 years old. I should be able to pay \$1 and go anywhere I want in the county.

So if you can consolidate all of that money that you're giving to these small fractions and united and give it to a region and we go before the Federal Government as a region and match their dollars, I think what is it? They match 80, we give up 20? We would have that 20% without any problem. Thank you very much. Have a nice day.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: There's an example of some vision on the service and some comments on how it works. Woman right there. It's going to be very hard for me to tell who is next. We'll try to get to everybody.

>> Ladies first.

>> TIFFANY JOHNSON: Okay. My name is Tiffany Johnson. I live in Munster, and I'm disabled. So I can't drive anywhere.

So to piggyback on what he said, it should be some kind of service, even if Dial-a-Ride goes to a specific place, Gary Transit, as long as it is a place that all of the buses could connect, at least that way people would be able to get from Point A to Point B even if it's Point A, Point A, B, C; but at least they would be

able to get to wherever they need to get.

>> INTERPRETER: Wait, stop.

>> MARY: I am Mary, how are you? I've been using transportation. I'm really happy about the buses that have been able to go to Walmart and PTO, go into the Bus No. 24. And Walmart. I get to go to Walmart and Target, the hospital. Good services I've been receiving. And it's been wonderful. I wanted to thank you for that. I live in Hammond, forgot to mention that.

>> STEVE WALSH: Do you have any thoughts on how the service might improve?

>> MARY: No. It gets me where I need to go, like Target and the grocery stores, and then it brings me home. So for me, it's a good service.

>> STEVE WALSH: Thank you. She uses Dial-a-Ride. And she's very happy with the service the way it is now. It's worked well for her. Ma'am?

>> DIANE SMITH: My name is Diane Smith. I live in Merrillville, Indiana.

I'd like to give you all a little bit of a different perspective. All of us don't live in

Dial-a-Ride territory; therefore, some of us have to pay to ride the buses that we ride.

And I was fortunate enough to apply for a Gary Public Transportation Corporation. I initially was given a temporary ridership. So I had to go to the doctor and have everything verified in order to ride to and from wherever I stop, \$4.

Well, after about three months, I had to have that same form filled out by a licensed physician. And I was granted a three-year ridership availability at \$4 per ride.

Now I also ride Southlake County buses; and because of funding, they have different problems that they have to deal with. Well, that's with any bus company. You got to pay for maintenance of the buses. You have to pay for the riders. You have to pay for a whole lot of things. And those rides for Merrillville residents are \$5 each way.

But there is a good part to that also. Yes, we have to pay the \$5 to go to and fro. Let's say I go to the mall and then want to ride back home. But if I go to Walmart after I go to the mall, which is less than a

mile away, then there's no charge for that second wing of the ride. So that's a good thing in that I don't have to pay \$15, I just have to pay the \$10.

>> STEVE WALSH: But takes some organization on your part to make sure you're doing two legs.

>> DIANE SMITH: Exactly. And then the bus company, well, they have different problems that they deal with, too, in terms of the bus drivers and things like that.

Also, we're under Ross Township, under that Trustee. It would be wonderful if all Trustees could get together and work out a system like they have with North Township. But that's not been possible yet.

We are fortunate, though, those of us who attend the Merrillville Senior Center, we're able to ride the buses to and from for free. So there are some perks to the whole thing.

There are negatives that we can find. But then we have to find the positives, too.

So I just wanted to stress that. Thank you, Margot.

>> STEVE WALSH: Seems like you can almost get --

have a chart that it costs me this much over here and this much over that. Do all the providers provide different charges? They all have different charges?

>> DIANE SMITH: Yes.

>> STEVE WALSH: And different rules for who can ride?

>> DIANE SMITH: There are different places that you live in Lake County that Southlake County may provide ridership, but there are different fees that are assigned to those places. Such as, if you're a Hobart resident, well, under the Maria Reiner Foundation, they are able to ride for free. You can ride anywhere you want to go in Lake County. So there are the perks that you get from living in different areas or having an address in different areas.

>> STEVE WALSH: You have to have a pretty high degree of education. You have to be an educated consumer here.

>> DIANE SMITH: Okay. I am disabled, as well, but it's not -- it should not be all of these filling out papers and whatnot only for disabled people because other people need to ride the bus, as well. So I think

if all of the Townships would get things together, that way anybody would be able to ride anywhere they need to be.

>> STEVE WALSH: Who is next here?

>> SALINE SHIPONIAC: I'll say something. My name is Saline Shiponiac. I live in Munster. And I'm so grateful. I can't even find the words to tell you how grateful I am that today AAA picked me up. And AAA picks me up because of Frank Myrvan's buses. And AAA worked together. And they come right to my house. Right to my house. I've been to the eye doctor this month. I have to get my pacemaker checked. I'm 87 years old. I have one son. My other son passed away at 49. And I have -- he lives in Morton Grove. At the present time he goes to school and he works for the District 319. He's in New Orleans all dealing with the school and his business. And he always says, "Mom, can the bus you get there?" Because at the drop of a hat he can't come seven times a week or whatever.

And I've been to the eye doctor recently. I go there to get my pacemaker checked. I go to Ultra every Monday with these two fine people next to me. I just

can't say -- there are no words to express for how grateful I am for the Dial-a-Ride.

>> STEVE WALSH: What would be your other option if you didn't have the Dial-a-Ride?

>> SALINE SHIPONIAC: I don't know. I don't know. I wouldn't have anybody. I have neighbors on each side of me. They are good people, but they never said, "Do you need a ride?" Never, ever. They are nice people. I can't say a mean word about it. But at the same time, they never say, "Where do you need to go?" I live in Munster now 42 years.

>> STEVE WALSH: Where I grew up, actually, Munster. My mom still lives there.

I'm terrible at keeping track. We'll get to everybody here.

>> SHERI COX: Hi, my name is Sheri Cox. I live in Valparaiso. As far as the public transportation, I love it. But what would I like to see? I would like to be able to get out of Valparaiso once in a while. I would love to connect with Lake County and be able to get out and shop, do anything I can in Lake County. And also, I would love to connect with other towns

within Porter County: Portage, somewhere else.

Being disabled and relying only on public transportation and not being able to get out of Valparaiso, I don't like that. I'm not comfortable with that. I'm independent. But I'm stuck. I'm stuck.

>> STEVE WALSH: Is it your only mode of transportation? You don't have a car?

>> SHERI COX: I can't drive, no. Since I became disabled, I can no longer drive. I have my daughter, but she has her life. She has a job. She can take me a little bit here and a little bit there, but I have to depend on public transportation for everything. I depended on the Green Line for my doctor's appointment this morning. And then to get here, I depended on Council on Aging. They brought me here. I brought the public transportation, but we need to connect.

And that's what I say that at all the meetings. Every meeting I go to, we need to be able to connect. Somewhere, sometime down the road, we have got to connect.

[Applause.]

Let me spend my money in Lake County. Let Lake County come to Porter County and spend their money.

[Applause.]

It's a win/win situation for everybody.

>> STEVE WALSH: Can I ask? Valparaiso is one of the real success stories. They started a bus service where we saw cutbacks in Lake County. What is the public support like in Valparaiso for the bus service?

>> SHERI COX: Excellent. Everybody who uses the V-Line loves it. I've not heard any complaints about OE. I use OE still. I used to work for OE. Bruce's company, I've not heard any complaints.

I mean, if you see the numbers. You talk to people here from those companies, and they'll tell you the same thing. They're not perfect. We don't have a perfect transit system wherever we go. We never will. But they're pretty close, especially for the handicapped.

And the fares, you cannot pass those fares up. I love the -- it's a shame that Lake County does not have the success that Valparaiso does.

>> STEVE WALSH: I kept saying light touch here. I

keep asking questions because I'm interested in the topic.

This woman here, actually. Make sure we get this woman here pretty close because I've seen her hand several times.

>> ANN DAWNS: My name is Ann Dawns. I'm from Merrillville. And I'm surprised that the people from Gary didn't know that we did have a regional transportation system.

>> Of course we had one.

>> ANN DAWNS: And we had one, but it disappeared because it could not meet the specifications required, I understand. But we also had disruptive meetings that discouraged people who really wanted it to come.

The gentleman who spoke first today, was that Mr. Myrvan?

>> STEVE WALSH: The Trustee, Frank Myrvan?

>> ANN DAWNS: He really said it well. The reason I'm so concerned, because I have transportation in Merrillville; and if Porter County gets to Lake County, which is disgraceful, but, you know, if people had shown up and supported that regional bus transportation

system, then we could have talked to Crown Point.

[Applause.]

We wouldn't have had the people down state laughing again and said, "Ha-ha, look at Lake County. They still can't get it together." Instead, we had disruptive meetings that were just a shame. And Mr. Myrvan said what we need in Lake County, what else do we need? We need jobs. We have land out there in Merrillville. We have land in St. John Township. We have land up here that can be redeveloped. But people have to be able to get there to hold the jobs.

When companies start looking for areas where they would like to be near, we have terrific training systems, everything else here, airports; but if they're going to build their company here, they have to have people get there. So what do they need to get there? They need transportation.

A man that's been laid off for three years has a skill, been laid off for three years because his job closed down. He doesn't have a car that he can afford to run 25 miles to get to the job or 20 miles or 5 miles. He probably doesn't have a legal license

anymore. But because he can't get there, he can't take the job.

So we need jobs. We really need jobs. We need people to get to jobs. We need people who no longer work to be able to take care of their needs without having to pay the cost of a car.

I pay over \$1,000 a year for car insurance. I pay to maintain that car. And I'm still so fortunate that I can drive that car. And I am delighted, and God is good.

But this, my point is when you are offered something good, which was the regional bus transportation system, and now even the RDA is waiting on State support, will they support the RDA again, or will that be gone? Because the money we got for that regional transportation system was from the RDA.

No, listen to me a minute. I'm really upset about this. And I am really serious. What we need in Lake County is bus transportation or some reasonable amount of transportation that can connect to Valpo and hopefully later on further on.

But you can't do it unless the Lake County

Commissioners, the Lake County Council and downstate stop laughing at us. That's really my pitch.

And, Mr. Myrvan. Thank you so much.

>> STEVE WALSH: She had her hand up several times.

>> JEREMY MILLER: I'll be brief to make a quick point. My name is Jeremy Miller. I represent what you may not be aware of is that we're calling the Emerging Leaders Network out of all three counties that are in this room today. It's a group of 30 and 40-somethings that are getting together on a monthly basis to identify key issues in the region that we believe will move us into the next generation.

The number one thing that is on our agenda is public transportation, buses and trains. We believe that to be the future of economic development and many other things. So all I want you to know, that there's another voice out there that many of you have not heard and seen from yet, but we're out there and we're trying to do the best we can. We hosted the Avalon event on the train situation back in March, and we'll be doing some things next year, as well. But the buses and regional transportation is high on our radar.

I would also like to make two other quick points. First and foremost, Frank and Ty couldn't be two better people to lead us in this direction. Whether you agree with them or not, they have the experience, the knowledge, the understanding of the region to help get us there.

I would suspect and hope that you give them some type and some opportunity, as Frank mentioned, the new beginning needs to happen. What happened in the past, let's move forward.

The last thing is this group that we represent of 30- and 40-something young professionals don't want a car. They want to take public transportation. So the myth of the rich drive the cars and the poor ride the buses is moving on as that generation passes. The millennials that are coming up, they don't want a car. That's why the brain drain is happening, because there's nothing in this area to keep them here because of public transportation. I thank you for your time.

>> STEVE WALSH: My daughter is a senior in high school in Valparaiso and hasn't gotten a license yet and is not all that sure to get one. Happy to have me

drive around or she uses the buses in Valparaiso.

>> BARBARA BLACKMAN: My name is Barbara Blackman. I live in Gary, Indiana. And I take transportation for the disabled. That's what brought me out here. I thank you for going as far as Indianapolis Boulevard. Now I can go see one of my doctors. But I have a son having surgery on his back at Community Hospital, and I can't get in to Munster. I have no transportation there.

I also am always asking about the talking buses. When the buses come, Gary buses, that they would let you know what street they're stopping at like Chicago buses? I'm visually disabled.

Also, I didn't have a printout in large print today. I'd like to mention that. And I'm hard-of-hearing, so I'm able to hear what's said today because everybody is talking pretty good. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: Part of a modern system is to have modern equipment.

>> RENEE JACKSON: Hi, my name is Renee Jackson. I've been dealing with transportation issues for over 20 years. At one point, over 20 years ago, I did work

with Everybody Counts and I stepped away. And I come back 20 years later and nothing has changed. That's so sad. Different people but the same attitudes.

Instead, I'm like everybody else. We need a regional public transportation system. Instead of doing what other communities do and building off what we already have, NIRPC supported the creation of a new organization which spent millions of dollars and did a really lousy job. Then it went out of business. And that made the Hammond residents really screwed because they had no way to have any kind of transportation.

GPTC has the history. They have the expertise. They have the equipment, the maintenance garage and the ability. We should be building off of what's already there instead of trying to reinvent the wheel.

Some say it's a racial issue why GPTC isn't getting the money that they need. But I think it's a matter of control because they don't need the Federal dollars. They don't receive the money from NIRPC. They have the Federal dollars of their own.

NIRPC puts a lot of money and work into developing our communities in places that the public transit does

not go. People need public transit for more than just going to the doctor. People with disabilities, we don't just go to the doctor. We like to go to the movies. We like to visit people. We like to just get on the bus and go. We don't need a reason, just ride. We don't have the "go to the doctor mentality" all the time.

>> Socialize.

>> RENEE JACKSON: Yeah, we like to socialize, thank you.

All the economic studies that were done about expanding the train line, why haven't we looked into the economic impact of letting more people get to jobs and to places where they will spend their money?

[Applause.]

I'll stress it again. We need public, a regional public transit system. And it's not just for those that are disabled. The community in itself needs it. Just because the majority of the people here are disabled, we're fitting for equality for everybody, transportation for everybody, not just us.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: That gentleman right there in the wheelchair with the blue shirt.

>> ROBERT DUBROWSKI: My name is Robert Dubrowski, and I live in Merrillville and I am disabled. And I am also an amputee and legally blind. And I have one question that Barbara had. How come there is no material here in Braille or large print? Because between, besides me, there are other people that could use Braille or large print materials. That's number 1.

I was told there was Braille materials here to call Steve at NIRPC. I did not get any response. I left my phone number. When I get here, there's no large print materials.

>> STEVE WALSH: Is there someone from NIRPC that can answer that question at all?

>> ROBERT DUBROWSKI: Steve is right up there, I believe. Steve, I left you a message.

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: Yes, Mr. Dubrowski and others who were interested in material, we didn't bring any handouts. We didn't know what to bring. We didn't get any specific request. So if you have a particular document you'd like to see in a particular format,

please call us and let us know. I'll be happy to do it. But we didn't get requests for any specific documents and we didn't know -

>> ROBERT DUBROWSKI: [Inaudible]

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: You didn't say which documents wanted, sir.

>> ROBERT DUBROWSKI: I said I need something, I'm legally blind, large print. I left Steve my phone number. I didn't even get a call. Deliberately probably did not listen.

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: Again, sir, what did you want in large print? We didn't hand anything out.

>> ROBERT DUBROWSKI: What did you hand out here?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: We didn't hand out anything. Everybody Counts did. Talk to them.

>> ROBERT DUBROWSKI: Whatever was supposed to be here in large print.

>> STEVE WALSH: Is this presentation going to be available for somebody who is visually impaired? Where do they get that?

>> TY WARNER: They can contact the NIRPC office. 217-763-6060, www.nirpc.org. We would be happy to get

you stuff.

>> Ty, do you work at NIRPC? Did you answer his question?

>> Excuse me. I just wanted to give clarification because I'm not sure I understood. The gentleman said he didn't get any large print or Braille handout. And you're saying, however, NIRPC did not provide any handout, any print material; correct? Okay. So nobody has anything. If somebody else provided a handout, that's whatever.

And as far as things being when you said this, I think you, sir, if this will be available? When something is available online, it can either be a person who has the software to read online, if they have it, visually can read it; if they don't, then the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that the person who provided the material make it available in large print or Braille or some other method that the person can use.

So I think people may not know that, yes, this will be available to everyone in the format they require. Braille might take a day or two. But right now, nobody

has anything because the material that's being transcribed, that's what you'll put on your computer; is that correct? Sir, Mr. Warner?

>> TY WARNER: On the web, that's correct.

>> Because right now there is nothing, is that correct?

>> TY WARNER: Correct.

>> So after this meeting, a day or two, this information on the screen will be transcribed and a link on your computer. And a person who has the software to read it, if they can't read it visually, will be able to; and if they can't, they call your office and request large print, Braille, whatever; is that correct?

>> TY WARNER: Correct.

>> Because I was hearing a lot of different things. I just wanted to make sure I understood it. Perhaps somebody else had the same questions.

>> Are you with NIRPC?

>> No, I'm not.

>> STEVE WALSH: Hands coming up here.

>> Also, I have another issue. I live in

Merrillville. I had to cancel one doctor appointment coming up three times because of poor transportation out here. I had a 9 a.m. appointment. I called South Lake County Community Services. They tell me they can't pick nobody up before 9. So I had to change it once. And then my appointment was on the 11th. I was told they don't run on the 11th, Veteran's Day. I had to change it the second time. So now I'm going to call them the third time and see if they could take me on Monday the 10th.

Now, I had taken Gary Public Transit, paratransit, before to outside therapy, VA hospital in Crown Point. I never had any complaints about Gary Public Transit. I think their help is excellent. Their service is excellent. But the problem is they don't go all over. At one point, when the RBA was in existence, I could get a ride to Munster where this doctor appointment is in two weeks. So I'd have to call Southlake County now.

I called RBA a couple weeks ago because I'm on Medicare/Medicare supplement. They used to pick me up when they were doing the work for RBA. They're telling

me now they don't go south of 61st Avenue to take me to Munster.

>> STEVE WALSH: That's not the RBA anymore. Who is that?

>> You mean AAA?

>> AAA won't take me. They don't go south of 61st Avenue. And I live like 76th Avenue, a couple miles away. That I don't understand. The way I looked at it, I think like Renee said, Gary Public Transit is capable with good drivers. I know there are drivers that have good sensitivity training, they're very polite. I think they should take care of the whole region. That's how I would like to see it. And some other people would, too.

>> STEVE WALSH: We have Rudy here with his arm up. He hasn't spoken up, yet.

>> RUDY VELASCO: My name is Rudy Velasco. A couple quick points. Number 1, the attitude about NIRPC with disabled? There's some group here where there's between 30 and 40. And they want to see improvement in the region. Well, 45 to 64, the age group, we have 20% people that are disabled in the

State of Indiana. So keep that in mind. It's a good thing they're there because they got to plan for the future. And you would not be here as advertised if it wasn't that we had filed a lawsuit against NIRPC. I've been to public meetings that they have. They're never advertised. The last one I went to, there was two and there was one little sign that just said NIRPC. They didn't say anything about public transit.

As far as for large print, all this to be safe rather than sorry. I've been at a NIRPC meeting of the Commissioners and this is the attitude that is being pushed forth. Tom McDermott, the mayor, was reading one of the reports, and we always asked that every NIRPC meeting have standard larger print for people that are able to attend. That's why their meetings are in Portage. There is no transit over there. There's no transit there to voice your opinion.

>> It's a setup.

>> So as far as the large print, McDermott asked at the meeting, "Hey, I can't see this. I need larger print." Their response is, "Oh, you're getting old." And they started laughing.

Now, is this an organization that's supposed to lead the way? They have the opportunity to lead the way for people with disabilities here in this region. We have a D rating by the Governor's Planning Council. There is no excuse for that. They're more concerned about a bicycle route rather than giving transportation, giving money so people can get about the city.

That was one of the things we brought up before. Why don't you study how much money will be spent by people riding the buses? If you are an older person, you do remember riding from Gary over here to Hammond and spend money. I come from a poor family. I was from a family of 10. That bus was our transit. Ain't nothing like a Goldblatts hamburger when you used to ride there back then. The region was prosperous.

We do need to collaborate with Workforce One. I'm attending meetings. A couple people disabled. I got a job, but I can't go. I don't have no transportation. I said wake up, NIRPC. Wake up. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: I don't want to spend the whole meeting talking about different access issues, but, Ty,

is there anything you want to respond to as far as the level of access you're able to provide or the way public meetings are conducted or anything at all?

>> TY WARNER: Sure. NIRPC -- first of all, the location of NIRPC, it is in Portage, it is true. There is no transit service. That was moved there about 20 years ago. And we are remaining in that location. We know that's an issue. The comment I'm going to make is: Transit is changeable. Transit does go to where the people are. And there are marketing studies to do about demographics to help show the demand for transit in certain areas. Transit is not a static thing like fixed rail where it has to be in that location.

There are other studies happening for the South Shore extension and whatnot for marketing draw for residents along that line to try to look at the need for that route. Similar kind of thing happens for transit. So we're aware that that's an issue at NIRPC, at NIRPC's location. But, conceivably, transit lines can change to be able to be brought to that location. But that's where we're at.

>> What about large print we ask for at the

meeting?

>> TY WARNER: The comment about the large print, too. First of all, I don't want to go back to that situation with Tom McDermott. I think that's out of context to what happened in that meeting. But the large print issue, we have a notice on every one of our materials about requesting large print formats, and we provide that for folks when they request it on site.

>> STEVE WALSH: I'm seeing second hands of people who have spoken before. Do we have anybody that hasn't had a chance yet? Lady right there in the back? We have plenty of time.

>> NANCY EBERT: My name is Nancy Ebert. I'm from Hammond. My name is Nancy Ebert. I live in Hammond. We in western Lake County, have been the aborted child of transportation for a short period of time because Frank and Chip from AAA have really serviced us well within the restraints that they have to stay within.

Of course we all want transportation to everywhere. Everybody does. If it's feasible. Are corporations being contacted? If they can make money, they're certainly going to possibly contribute. I don't hear

any solutions to any of the problems. All I ever hear at these meetings are complaints and everybody wanting their personal attention.

I live within my area very happily because I'm thankful for the people that do serve us. And why do we have to always come to meetings and listen to the same complaints that can't be resolved until there are solutions that are offered?

Now, if it's an economic thing, it always is. We're in a big down -- sorry, I lose my voice a lot. Anyway, corporate entities like Target, they mention Walmart, they mention different places. If they want their bottom line to be up higher, hey, maybe they'll get involved. Who knows? Has anybody ever contacted big business to see what they think about having any transportation? Probably they have. But just a thought.

But everyone always complains. All we need is a centralized, one entity that we can all have and everybody gets everything they want. That isn't how the world works. Fair isn't fair. It doesn't exist. You take what you can get and then you work toward

better and be kind and help people to offer what they really need. And eventually it'll be solved if it's on a one-on-one basis or a 1-on-10,000 basis, doesn't matter, we still have to use logic. We still have to use our intelligence, whether it's high, low or indifferent. It doesn't matter.

We all want a centralized transportation hub. But where's it going to be? It has to be set up so that it has, okay, we have a centralized hub, but we also have its little spokes that go out that can serve the communities. And that way they're all covered. You have communication between Hammond and Valparaiso because you can go straight through wherever the hub is and it can be transferred. Can't solve the money problem, maybe you can get some of these businesses to contribute a percentage of their minuscule profits. I know that's a joke, I'm sorry.

>> STEVE WALSH: That could be a solution to the local -- what would be your solution to the local funding?

>> The local funding, I know we are all counting on politics to do it. Politics don't go very far. We

can't. They can't. They can't serve everybody. And, yes, I'm disabled. No one sees all my disabilities. They see that I'm on a scooter, oh well, that's called life. It happens. I was bedridden from the age of 43. But that's immaterial. I'm happy. I'm so very happy and thankful for Chip and AAA, for Frank and for the Dial-a-Ride people that serve me so well. They do care. And they're here to -- they want a solution.

But the centralized hub, okay, fine. Find a place. Have your centralized hub, but have spokes going out to the different major entities.

But have we ever hit big business with their contributions? If they want more customers, well then, hey, kick in of a little bit. But nobody wants to kick in a little bit, obviously. I don't know if you guys have touched big business, I really don't. But they would also have a larger pool of employees if they were to help with the transportation problems that we have here.

Funding is hard to get. It's hard to get money out of people. They're hanging on to it with tight fists. But if you go about it just yelling and hollering and

complaining, nothing is ever going to be accomplished that way, it just isn't. People will listen to you, they'll smile and understand and walk away. The greasing wheel isn't true anymore. Oh, well. I'm sorry. My three minutes are up and I will respect that.

>> STEVE WALSH: I'm glad you are timing yourself. Remember, we're trying to get to everybody who has the first time around who hasn't spoken yet once. I know the gentleman over here who has the helper animal wasn't being particularly helped.

>> REVEREND MAC: I really don't know where to start. I don't have enough hands. Okay. Can everybody hear me? I, too, as many have said in here, am impaired in different ways. One of the strangest things that I thank God for giving me something I didn't even realize I had, there are many people in here who have eyes but they can't see. There are people in here who have ears, can't hear. And I'm thankful when I was a kid, I was exceptional at having 20/10 vision. Most people are 20/20. I never dreamed that I would have the sight I have now. Blind in one

eye and almost totally blind in the other eye. I have a hearing impairment, as well. Some other things happened. I was hit by a car, left for dead. But the young lady said earlier, those are just things that happen in life. You move on. And we are taught to survive. Many of us are overcomers.

What I found out growing up with my mom, glaucoma and 30 years or plus I watched her, the TradeWind deal, the whole nine yards, and it's amazing to me that it's the same old song. People that have complained about people that don't have. People that don't have complain about people that have. And instead of the two coming together to make everybody have, all they do is divide. I didn't come here to divide. I came here to bridge together. And hopefully that can happen.

We're talking about the guard -- that's NIRPC. The guard. Now years it's been a watermelon patch. That's GPTC. A watermelon patch. The biggest thing here as long as there's been Gary, 100 years. The main entity. People that didn't have public transportation, you heard, I'm sorry. You heard the people that told you about where they could go. My dad even went to South

Shore, watched a movie, got popcorn for 25 cents. Rode a train. Watched the movie and ate popcorn for 25 cents. That's back quite some time. But public transportation was the way that they went as young people.

Those that have disabilities, there's a lot of things going on. And some people spoke about that.

My dad was in the military. And I've been all kinds of places. My dog's named Moses. He helps me to deliver some things, including me. But what I really want to say is that I've been all over the place living here and there all over the place. And when I came here, this was one of the craziest places I've ever been, of all the places I ever been to, of all the places. It's so crazy here. So divided. It's unbelievable how divided people are here. I know people that are here and have friends all over the place.

I was able to drive for 47 years. I'm 64 now. For the last 17 years I've experienced it personally myself. Freedom. I drove my car. Go mention my doctor. I'd come in there and he'd ask me:

Mr. McCraven -- some call me affectionately Reverend Mac, I'm sorry I didn't introduce myself. Probably most people know who I am, but that's not the proper way to do it. I am affectionately called Reverend Mac. My doctor would ask me if I had my keys. There is nothing more powerful you start losing some of that, you find every way to get it back. Any kind of way you can find to get it back.

I drive my car for eight years with one eye and a half gone. Glory to God. Because I couldn't get the people who were around me, "Can you take me?" They got a different excuse why they couldn't take me. At first it's all fine. When you lose a loved one, everybody is patting you on the back, "I'm so sorry." And about 24 hours later, you don't hear none of them no more. You're left alone again. It is the same thing here.

And I want to say to some people, they bring it up and they don't understand. It's all big non-answer. It's teaching people how not to know something. When people don't know something, knowledge is power. You don't want them to know. You don't want them to know, that's the problem. You don't want them to know. You

don't want people to know because if they knew it, they would be a thorn in your side, "Well, why isn't this?"

I am a minister. Do you know what? I came out of the street. I didn't grow up in church. You were this and I did this and had a really dark background and God brought me into light, glory to God, and I thank him for it, and I say can you pray that God would help my husband so he could become like you? The craziest thing happens we this like me -- start doing things right. They find out, they come back to me and say hey, I didn't want him that right because they weren't doing right. And that's the same thing when people learn knowledge. They require something out of the other people because now you know something.

But when you keep people ignorant, keep people not knowing, it's amazing how powerful that is. People don't want people to come. They can -- people don't want the truth. Speak truth to people all day long, what do they do? They walk away from it. Tell them a lie. Because the "hell-a-vision" people turn on all day long and watch the "hell-a-vision," watch the lies of the media, taking people and transporting people's

minds to believe one way.

And I'm thankful because there's people here. Everybody here has this. There's four things. You frame things and don't realize it. Whatever you believe, you put it in a frame and you hang it up.

And I got back to this garden. This garden with this watermelon, glory to God. And in it there's this garden that's got the grape. That's what the plum is, another entity. And the plum is being tried to be made by the gardener into an eggplant. Some good things about eggplant, but most people don't like it. I don't want that. But it seems like everybody likes the watermelon. But for whatever reason, the watermelon is shrinking. They are getting small. But then there's the honeydew. There's the cantaloupe. Glory to God.

So why are we getting all these other things that are there instead of putting them all in the same basket and making it just one thing out of the garden that everybody brings all the money to the same garden. We're dividing it all over the place.

And the thing I want to say before I sit down is I lived in what's called the "Dead Zone." What she's

talking about, the other lady. We had that. I used to ride \$2 all around Lake County. Don't tell me you couldn't do it. All around Lake County, \$2, to get off. I had friends in Schererville, Munster because I worked in the mill with Brother Rudy. I am a likable personality, like my dog. I had people. They people from the Ku Klux Klan and thought we wouldn't get along. I'd get along with the devil, glory to God.

But what I want to know: Do we have a problem? We need to come together. I'm not going to say what it is because most of us know what it is. We know what it is. I live in the dead zone. The dead zone is called Merrillville. We had the bus. We had Ross Township. I lived in Crown Point. It took me two years calling the people, not mentioning the names, they know who they are. Two years to call Mr. NIRPC, two years I call out to the RBA people and the person blah, blah, blah, he come out and talk to me. "Well, I heard you wanted to ride on my bus system." Because I said maybe I got too much fudge in it. And he laughed. He said about the mayor. He laughed.

But it wasn't really funny to me because I lived

out there for two years and I was asked all kinds of things. You sure you don't live in Gary? I live in Crown Point. 9493 Monroe Street, Crown Point. I live there. I couldn't get a bus for a while. When I got hooked up more into this, the next thing I know I'm getting a call "would you like to ride on our service?"

>> I gave you the minister's three minutes.

[Laughter]

>> REVEREND MAC: That's 10. So I got 10. But I took and waited for everybody else. I waited.

>> STEVE WALSH: I want to make sure we get everybody.

>> REVEREND MAC: And I want to say this last thing. Can I say the last thing?

>> STEVE WALSH: Sure, do it.

>> REVEREND MAC: I love you anyhow.

>> STEVE WALSH: Thank you, sir.

>> REVEREND MAC: Can I get my last thing? Can it be my last thing? You're not saying nothing. He said yes? I wasn't lying and you are standing in front of me. God bless everybody. But let's get together. Let's get together. NIRPC, people here.

And I tell you something else and you gave me an extra minute, he pulled my coat tails. You don't pull coat tails, that means sit down.

>> STEVE WALSH: You got my hands full.

>> REVEREND MAC: Anyway, what I'm going to say is something good. Everybody is saying once the people get on the bus, the bus system seems to work, it works good. Why can't they work good as one entity? As one hub? That's all I want to know. When and how?

And do you know what? Next year is 50 years. 50 years since 1965. And how long does it take to find out how to get to Portage? 20 years? From East Chicago, from Whiting. They say they can't get transportation to Portage, did you hear that? Is that part of you, too?

>> STEVE WALSH: That's not part of me.

>> REVEREND MAC: They can't find out how to get to Portage, can't get a bus route to Portage so people could come to the meeting. Did I hear that right? Somebody listened to me, they pulled my coat tail.

>> STEVE WALSH: Fresh hands. Who has not spoken yet? He has never spoken at a public meeting. We'll

get to you.

>> JACK CLAUSEN: My name is Jack Clausen. I live in Valpo. My name is Jack Clausen, I live in Valpo. I have two comments that I didn't realize until I walked in this room.

Number 1, do you know why they call us special needs? Because we are special. Everybody else out there is common. So we have something to be proud of. Just because we are handicapped --

>> REVEREND MAC: I'm not handicapped. I'm disabled. Impaired. You don't put a cap in my hand.

>> Let the man talk.

>> JACK CLAUSEN: I didn't interrupt you, sir.

>> REVEREND MAC: I'm sorry. I apologize. But that offends me to hear handicapped.

>> JACK CLAUSEN: My second comment is on these regional, whatever committee that meets in Portage. And for all the other top hierarchy of the bus lines and train lines and all of that, how many of those people are handicapped? How many of those people get in their Cadillac or their Olds or whatever and forget about what they're really -- who's paying them? We're

the fools that's paying them. And us fools need to grow and become -- there need to be more of us here. I mean, what? There's maybe 50, 60 people in this room?

>> That's an improvement.

>> JACK CLAUSEN: There ought to be 5 or 6,000 in this room and maybe the people that are in charge will go, whoa. But I don't think anybody really understands how many is out there. I mean, my wife's like the young man over here. She's blind in one eye and can barely see out of the other one. She's in a wheelchair because -- got ahold of her. Shattered her femur. We've all got a special story. But that's because we're different than the average people. I think most people want to say sit down, fat old man. So just remember that.

>> STEVE WALSH: Where are you from again? How often do you use public transit right now?

>> JACK CLAUSEN: Right now I don't use it as much as I could because Valpo is on a fixed route. And there again, I live about a half mile from the -- where they pick up at. I have COPD. And there are days I can't walk a half a mile. And I have to make special

allowances so that they can come to my front door and I could get on it.

Right now, I am capable enough to where I can drive. But in December, I got hit with glaucoma and I don't know how much longer I'm going to have my eyes.

>> STEVE WALSH: What do you think the solution is? What's the solution?

>> JACK CLAUSEN: The solution? Walk a mile in his shoes or her shoes or her shoes. But nobody wants to do that. They say they want to do it, but they don't want to do it, because they find out how hard life is.

When you sit down -- when you go out to get the mail at the end of the driveway, do you get out of breath before you come back? Well, that's called COPD. When I was a baby, they called it asthma. I still think -- and I always will -- that if you're going to have a commission for handicapped, part of the commission needs to be handicapped so they can fight for what we need.

>> STEVE WALSH: Gentleman in the back hasn't spoken yet.

[Applause.]

Then the lady over here that hasn't spoken, either, in the corner here.

>> GEORGE T: -- meek and humble citizen of Lake County Indiana, the region more specifically of Hammond, Indiana.

You know, transportation is, I don't know how much historical evidence was brought up before I arrived, but we've had transportation. We lost it. Now we're trying to get it back again. It's the typical scenario that we saw with a lot of other things that happened in our lifetime about our situations and the services. But basically being involved in transportation for probably like the last 25 years, to see exactly what can be done about it, where it needs to go, you know, all of the problems and all of the circumstances pretty much boil down to a few fundamental components. And trying to find solutions for those fundamental components wouldn't be as complex as providing public transportation. Obviously it's not easy because we've been trying for a long, long time.

Transportation, in essence, is almost like the Loch Ness monster, in that today you figure with Geo Earth

and cell phones and everything else, we are bound to have found that rascal some place or a picture.

Well, in essence we've done the same thing with transportation. Despite a lot of services, a lot of community involvement, a lot of elected officials and agencies involved in it, do you know what? We still can't find it. And so we continue for that quest because it's an important asset not just to the citizens, and it's the right thing to do but also to the community as a service and also as an economic booster.

The things that I see in transportation is the complex issues of our funding, planning and execution more than anything else. And wrapped and overlapping all those areas is frustration. You hear communication, you hear a lot of the frustration coming out in the communication here. And it basically incorporates a lot of those three elements which is funding, planning and execution.

So what are the potential solutions? Well, right now you are taking a look at Congressman Visclosky's push to get the west rail corridor. Public

transportation or a seeding of public transportation should have been included with that because it goes hand-in-hand with rail transportation. They complement each other tremendously.

If you take a look at a lot of the western suburbs where a similar type of concept is being employed, public transportation is essential complimentary element to the rail transit, also.

Number 2, you have the RDA. One of the demonstration projects that was entrusted to the RDA was public transportation. And we haven't seen anything yet. We've seen a couple of brief attempts at introducing public transportation and they've failed. They basically died on the vine.

So what do we need to do? Well, basically funding, I promised my solutions are areas we need to take a look @lease to the get transportation-seeded. If you get it started, then you have to then obviously the plans necessary, but I think it's the execution and the leadership of the execution which is very critical. We've tried public transportation. We've had some funding here. It was called the RDA. It failed

miserably. And in my opinion, I qualify my opinion, my opinion, it failed because of bad leadership and nothing more than that.

[Applause.]

We didn't have the right people managing the entire concept. If you start a restaurant, you don't have auto mechanics manage. So when you start transportation, you should bring in professionals who are involved in public transportation to manage and help develop that idea rather than retreaded politics from some other service, some other elected service area where they were at. That's why it failed more than anything else.

I think it was a lot of good ground people there. But if you don't know how to manage, if you don't understand transportation, it's not easy. And I support my case more than anything else by the fact that grassroots efforts have been able to coordinate professional transit agencies such as North Township's Dial-a-Ride, GPTC, East Chicago Public Transit, able to coordinate those agencies to provide service opportunities for events, and it's worked very, very

well. So we know that it does work. We know that the professionals in those areas are very effective.

You could take a look at Gary Public Transit. They continue to evaluate and establish new transit opportunities for people. And it's successful. So it can be done. I mean, that's the supporting element and the fact. And that's why I say with bad leadership more than anything else that caused the RDA to fail.

Now, are you going to be able to provide a public transit agency that will make everybody happy? That's impossible. It's just not going to happen. But you got to start some place. You got to have a ground floor kind of insertion here into the area to find out just what the issues are and work from that. It will take a lot of cooperation. It will take a lot of partnering on a lot of people's parts, but it's there. The resources are there. The talent's there. The funding obviously we'll have to look for again. But I think that those opportunities with the RDA and rail corridor should have provided us the foot in the door, so to speak, to get something on the table to support the existing efforts, grassroots efforts in

collaboration with the professional transit agencies here.

Outside of that, communication is essential. And you hear a lot of frustration. But what you do is you have to take a look at the fact that all criticism has value. There's a reason why people are criticized. And you have to be able to take that objectively and somehow form that into then part of the solutions for transportation. And that's my 15 minutes on the soap box. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: We're getting into the last half hour, so if you haven't spoken, start thinking about what you want to say.

This woman in the corner, she was the next one. We have got about a half hour left. We'll get into some of the folks that want to speak again, but I first want to get the folks who haven't.

>> My name is Esther, and I live in Hammond. And my thing is with the funding, has Lakeshore thought about maybe banquet fundraisers? Silent auctions? And if you call and I would be willing to, I don't have computer, I'd like to have one, my question is if you

call the businesses in Hobart, Merrillville, Crown Point, all these towns, Highland, save your pop cans, save your newspapers, recycle them, get money, have that money go to the public transportation system. Has that been thought of?

>> STEVE WALSH: Can anybody from NIRPC talk about whether or not there's ever been a volunteer element to this? Whether or not people have tried to get the local match by using volunteers in any way?

>> TY WARNER: I'm not aware of any effort.

>> STEVE WALSH: It's a lot of money, though, I would say.

>> It would be a lot of money because Community Hospital in Munster is doing all this stuff. They're getting these patients who are getting pop cans to drink how many times a day? That's just like money thrown in the trash can when it can go to all the public transportation for Northwest Indiana, Porter County and all the other counties.

>> STEVE WALSH: Theresa, you haven't spoken during the actual hearing here. You're next up.

>> THERESA TORRES: Couple of quick things. First,

I want to make sure if I didn't make it clear earlier that I wanted to commend Gary Public Transit, East Chicago Transit and North Township Trustee's Dial-a-Ride services because they are working with the people.

[Applause.]

With respect. And we appreciate that. We think that serves as a model of what needs to happen in the future.

You know, we've heard about Valparaiso's service. One of the major differences between what's happening in Valparaiso and what we had in Lake County is that Valparaiso's bus services started in recent years. What they did before they started it is have public meetings like this where they actually invited people to come, have them at times and places where people could get there, and listened to the people. And that's what we need more of.

Now, our biggest criticism of NIRPC historically has been their lack of what we perceive as legitimate effort to actively engage the real stakeholders in the community in the dialogue. They have a public

participation plan. In that public participation plan, it will tell you that Everybody Counts endorses the content. That is incorrect. Am I right? Those people that work?

Now, the reason that it's incorrect is because we asked it to contain expectation and accountability, which would say "when we do this event, these are the outreach steps we'll take." Instead, what we were told yesterday at the meeting, nobody knew about was we're going to have a shopping list. Us being NIRPC. And that shopping list is going to have a whole lot of different things that we can pick and choose from.

How does that tell you what your rights are? How does that say that they have -- they're guaranteed? See this kind of process today, this doesn't happen. So I for one want to commend you, Mr. Walsh, for enabling the people to speak freely and to facilitating. Thank you.

[Applause.]

And this is what needs to continue. So if NIRPC learns anything out of this, I want to know, I would like to hear a commitment today that instead of calling

the police when six senior citizens show up at a meeting holding little signs, that NIRPC start recognizing change is messy. And so is interacting with the public. But that is your job, I'm sorry.

So that's what we need. We need a commitment that there will be more of these opportunities. That instead of putting survey up on a shopping list, that you'll put one out there. Put it on the website, put it in the newspaper. Use the community, all the organizations in the community. Don't give us lip service. Let us help you make sure we get service. Thank you.

[Applause.]

One last thing. Were you going to talk about people calling Everybody Counts? One of the things I heard the gentleman earlier, the gentleman said when you have people with disabilities, organizations for those that don't know Everybody Counts, the majority of our Board of Directors and the majority of our staff are people with disabilities. And working together, we form what's called a Council on Accessible Transit, once again with support from the previously mentioned

folks.

How many members of the Council on Accessible Transportation are here today? Mr. Dubrowski, did you quit? Okay. Thank you. I wanted to make sure. My point is: The reason I want to put that out there is if there are any individuals with disabilities, frankly, anybody, but people with disabilities, Debra, I forgot you, sorry, I didn't look to my left -- if there are any who are interested in getting more involved in this issue with respect to transportation, please call us. Please go to Renee right there or Rudy over there. Rudy, put your hand up. Give them your contact information or call us, 769-5055. And we'll make sure that you are invited to the meetings and the opportunities we have to continue talking about this topic. You can make the changes here. So we need you to help. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: We are going to a commercial here so we have to move on here. Has anybody not spoken yet want to get a chance to speak before we wrap up this session? The attorney back there. Oh, no. We're down to the attorney. It's gotten that bad. And then there

will be this woman here. She's also interested.

>> STEVE CYRUS: Thanks. I just wanted to make one comment and this really goes to the large -- I know that's been an issue and question of a couple people I talked to. There was an obligation for folks that haven't seen the Settlement Agreement that we entered into, there was an obligation to ensure that information that was made available at this presentation was made available in alternative formats. So the fact that a decision was made to use the PowerPoint, I will confess that that PowerPoint was shared with me yesterday afternoon. I erroneously made the assumption that the PowerPoint was going to be shown, that there would be a mechanism for persons with visual impairments, et cetera, to be able to follow along to the presentation that was provided.

And I heard I think it was Miss Sandau that had indicated -- well, the ADA technically requires X, Y and Z. But the Settlement Agreement had different requirements in it. I wanted to make sure everyone is aware. And to the extent that you had made the request for the large format, I do think that the spirit of the

agreement would have required or should have had those materials being provided here in the large format for persons that made the request. So that's all I wanted to say.

[Applause.]

>> Hello, everyone. My name is Raquel Kassroll, and I work for Health Visions Midwest. We develop programs that impact chronic disease. And we know that mobility impacts health, economic development and the flourishing of the people in our communities. We're here. Their voice is they need more transportation.

We're having an event in East Chicago for emergency preparedness. We're so thankful that we have East Chicago Transit, who always is there for us, and also Mr. Myrvan. We need them. We definitely have that from them. But we need more because we know people are concerned and they're constantly telling us that the system is fragmented. But I really want to thank all of you and commend everyone here in this room. We're here for the people. We're not working for ourselves. We work for the people. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: [Inaudible]

>> MAYOR SNEDECOR: I'll be brief. I think this has been interesting to be able to sit in and hear from people. And I see a variety of responses: People who are not happy with public transportation as it is today, those that are happy but see the need for improvements, and then those who are happy with what they have access to. So I see a variety of responses today.

In the City of Hobart, we're not the biggest city in Lake County. We're a community of about 29,000. But on a given day, with our commercial districts and workplaces, we can swell to anywhere between to 60 to 100,000 people. And so we've had to get creative in our transportation needs with what's accessible to us right now.

The good example is Gary Public Transportation. They have been great to work with. They provide some extension of their bus service to our Northwinds development, which is out on Mississippi Street. When we approached them about a need to extend their service about another half mile, they were willing to work with us. And I want to commend Mr. Wright for doing that.

South County has been wonderful to work with our seniors and those with needs.

We've also had, you know, some conversation with Valparaiso about possibly working with them on a possible stop with the Dash.

So as a community, we've had to try to tackle this on multiple fronts. And maybe other communities may need to do the same thing.

And as far as NIRPC, please keep in mind, yes, this is the regional planning group, but it's for a three-county. Sometimes -- and I'm going to be very blunt -- sometimes we in Lake County feel like we're the big brother, and our focus is constantly on Lake County. And I'm from Lake County. I lived in Lake County all my life. But I always have to keep in mind, as Chairman this year at NIRPC, that we represent three counties. We represent Lake County, Porter County and LaPorte County. And so we have to represent the populations of all three counties. And sometimes that's a balancing act.

And as elected officials, they come to represent your various communities. Certainly communicating with

them on an ongoing your concerns is important.

And I just want to say thank you today for everyone that took the time to come here and state your concerns. And I think that's how we -- as an elected official, and I know there's other elected officials here from other communities -- that's important for us to hear firsthand.

So, Stevie, I want to commend you for facilitating as far as the moderator, and certainly the legal staff that are here from Everybody Counts and NIRPC and everybody that played a part in this, Ty and the staff. I think this has been a team effort.

You know, I know sometimes Theresa and I have agreed and sometimes we disagreed. But I think that's where everybody coming together and trying to work for the common good for everyone and understanding everybody has different needs, that's where things can get accomplished.

So I'll shut up, Steve.

>> STEVE WALSH: Is there anybody else, number one, who has not spoken yet? Any other folks from other communities who hasn't had a chance yet?

This guy wants to go No. 2. We have a couple more minutes. Let's go to No. 2.

>> Yes. Hello again. I remember the young lady in the corner, she said that a lot of times people just kind of concern themselves with their own situation. You know, like they say, once a man, twice a beggar. I don't subscribe to that because when I see disabled people, elderly people, especially these people were very mobile in their life, I think about that if the good Lord allows me to live, I might be down that road and maybe somebody would be an advocate for me.

So I hate to see and hear them complain about their elders, because my mother now is down and she's only 70 years young. And I don't like to see people in that situation, especially if they were contributing to the community. And a lot of them have impressive backgrounds. Even if they don't have impressive backgrounds, they still mean something to us even if they don't mean a lot to the community as a whole, as an elected official, a doctor, whatever.

I just want to say that. I know that we always complain about things like she was saying and like --

was saying, yes. Knowledge. We feel that if we don't know a lot of things, it could be the blind leading the blind, no pun intended.

I would like to thank David Wright for being here. And I would like to thank the people that also helps us in the community, like everybody else who do get involved in disagreements with our elected officials as well as they should.

So I think that there's a time to be polite and there's a time to speak up. And the Bible says there's a time for this, that and the other. So we have to get on their nerves sometimes.

And as far as us, when he asks the gentleman here, when you said what do you think the answer is? Well, sometimes, since we're not going to be able to go into their computers and sit in their meetings and know exactly how the money is going, we can give our little hypothesis on how we feel this should be done and have our own little think tank, but as long as we're on the outside looking in, we can't sit and talk to the mayor in his office and have privileged information accessed to us. You can tell us something, but how do we really

know?

So I just want to let you know that when it comes down to the solutions, yeah, we could come together, like you said, a regional deal. And the young lady was saying she likes to get out, outside of Valparaiso. And I think about situations, Gary GPTC, the county line, it goes by the South Shore. It goes by the Metro Center. The No. 12 goes past the South Shore on Clark Road.

But at the same time, what about those who can't jump on the South Shore physically and go and take advantage of the Michigan City transit or the transport in South Bend? But you still have to have those connecting factors, like the lady said.

So I would like an answer. We keep complaining about it, but I would like an answer for the people. I would like to get a little more detail from you. Little more detail from my mayors. We keep saying what we think. I would like a straightforward answer. Is there anyone here that could answer that question?

>> STEVE WALSH: Does anyone want to take a crack at that? Why this hasn't moved farther and faster?

I knew I grew up here. I covered this issue my whole life. I'm fairly stuck. Anybody do you want to take that? Briefly.

>> TY WARNER: Yeah. These issues are obviously complicated and hard. And it comes down to funding. And this is what we keep saying over and over again that is the challenge that we're trying to find solutions to is a dedicated source of local funding to be able to expand transit service.

We've been trying to do that. Our plan in the adopted documents are very clear on NIRPC's wanting an expanded regional transit system. We're trying to find solutions to be able to create that. We wish there was transit service available to our office. We wish there was transit services across the entire region. We have not been able to sustain local funding with the dedicated source to be able to make that happen. Until we can identify that stable revenue, we just can't pull transit out of the air no matter.

I understand the angst, the passion about wanting to expand transit. We want that as well. But until we get that dedicated source.

>> But who is getting in the way? When you say funding, you kind of opened up the box. Who has reached out and who said we can't help you? Best chance we had when we had the RBA. I understand there's decisions how that was run. That was before my time. I can't speak specifically to that issue except for the funding source. That got them so far. And the funding source didn't continue. So until we can get actually identify what will sustain that, whatever that source is, it's going to be a challenge.

>> I choose to disagree. I don't think it's entirely the funding. But the allocation of funding is what you spend the money on and who you give the money to.

When you spend excess money on things that should have been going directly for the regional service, then it's pretty hard to have a regional service. Do you understand what I'm saying? It's how you allocate the money. What pocket it goes in that's going to determine the destiny of this area. If you put it in the wrong pocket, like the RBA did, then you're going to get a blotched system. That's what you have now.

You have been putting -- you've been funding the wrong programs.

[Applause.]

You keep doing that. You keep funding AAA, who makes excess amount of money every month. Every month. We pay them 23-, 24,000 every month. This is out of the question. You need to be focusing on the regional system. How will we develop a regional bus system?

And then you talk about getting things like Dial-a-Ride. I have nothing against Dial-a-Ride, okay, in conjunction with the bus system, with a regional system.

So if you have a person who says okay, I don't want to go down or I can't walk down to the bus station or to the bus, then they get on a paratransit. And you should have that paratransit linked with the bus system. So that it makes it really accessible to everyone. Everyone. Not just one person who is happy and satisfied with the service of AAA, but everyone. Never speak for one. That's selfish. Everyone to have public transportation.

>> TY WARNER: To address the notion this is going

to a lot of different services in Lake and Porter Counties not going into one service, I want transit service for everyone, as well. Those local funding sources are created and are identified to be able to provide service in whatever form is able to happen. And part of the region where it happens. It's not, again, I have to keep repeating this. It's not as if there is a pool of money that is just decided where that goes. Those origins of those funds are locally determined. When those funds are able to be identified on the local level, they can be applied to access Federal funds.

>> But if we had a regional service, that money would be identified for the regional service.

>> TY WARNER: I don't disagree with you at all.

>> Go down state and talk to our representatives and they laugh at us because we don't have a regional bus system. They would send more money up here if we had a regional bus system, if the money was coming through the region.

>> TY WARNER: It would be established. We'd be ready to go then.

>> If we can figure out -- and this is why I think this is helpful. If we can figure out how to connect the pieces of what's existing right now to be able to connect these dots to create that regional system.

>> First thing you do is talk to the representatives and say to them, we now want to -- the people of Indiana, the people of the region here of Indiana, of Northwest Indiana, want a regional bus system.

>> And it's long past due.

>> I guarantee you those representatives would start focusing on that idea. But if you keep piecemealing the way you do, you're always going to have them say okay, send a little bit here and a little bit here. A little bit there and they never connect.

>> Shut them up for a little while.

>> STEVE WALSH: Do we have a consensus?

>> Raise your hands if you do.

>> STEVE WALSH: Have we seen this consensus in Northwest Indiana? The way we see about extending?

>> Let's do a survey and find out. That's what we need to do.

>> Go to South Bend, go to Mishawaka. We need that.

>> The train service, they misled on that, too. They should have developed the regional bus system to connect with the train. Trains and buses go together. What's going to happen when those people get off the trains other than going to Chicago that has a bus system? What's going to happen to those people if they get off in Gary or if they get off in Hobart or they get off in Hammond?

>> If they can get off. All the train stations aren't accessible.

>> If they pick them up to the businesses where they want to go.

>> They're not accessible, so we're crying able-bodied, but she can't get on.

>> Like a man that would understand this and like for this to happen.

>> TY WARNER: I would like to make that happen. I totally agree these things are related. We have a big push for a rail extension, as you said. Part of that picture has to be transportation.

>> How we do that is one voice. Grassroots. The way you do that, NIRPC, is you must keep us informed. You must let us know. There's public radio. I'll get the stations that you connect with that the poor people listen to, that ride your buses. A five-minute spot on there will contact more people than you would ever think of right there in Gary and Hobart, and all the other places in Crown Point. You need to talk with the people. You need to go on the radio show and talk to people. We need to love you because you got the money.

>> TY WARNER: We can help you access the money. We don't have the money.

>> The way of words. The establishment in Indianapolis or wherever the money is contacts you and gives you the right to distribute whatever monies. That's what I'm saying.

>> Somebody needs to be a talking head on a radio. We can talk to Ty. He comes on blah, blah, blah.

I hate to hear somebody tell me secondhand this is what's going on. That sucks. Let us know. You be a personality or whoever, the person that loves to be on the radio. So that way we'll know so we know what's

going on.

>> STEVE WALSH: We're getting into the last words territory. One more call to anybody who hasn't really had a chance to speak?

>> I was just wondering, Steve, the money through NIRPC, through the development, they get monies for the communities, Whiting, East Chicago, Gary, different developments, \$22 million here, \$30 million there, how come NIRPC doesn't ask everybody to give a little bit of a percentage to help develop this mobile service, this transit service?

>> TY WARNER: Percentage from?

>> If they are getting \$22 million to develop lakefront Marquette, different projects, what good is it if we're building -- every community is building itself up if no one can get there to see the beauty where the money is being invested?

>> TY WARNER: I agree. The investments we're making across this region have to be integrated with the bigger picture, right. It's all connected. When NIRPC does 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan, it was trying to start that connection happening. We've still

got a way to go before those things are fully integrated. I think you're right.

>> I haven't seen too many political officials here. They should be. Other than the transit servants right here locally have stood up, and they took that initiative. When they did the fair and showed it could work. Look at how many people from the regions are here.

I commend Lisa May here. She's on the Board of Trustees for North Township. She's interested. That's what they need. We need more of them. Or these people who let their officials know, their city officials that we need this transit.

>> STEVE WALSH: Listen, just real quickly. I'm not going to belabor this. But I think everybody wants to look at NIRPC as being the problem solver for this; it's not NIRPC that's going to solve this problem. It has to be the communities. And the representatives of the communities that are going to embrace that there needs to be a regional transportation system.

Not all communities are going to buy into that. Certainly in Hobart we could use it. Again, I

mentioned Mr. Wright, Gary Public Transportation. They run an extension that gets to our commercial district. Without that, there would be a lot of people that couldn't access that.

But, again, I think that everybody wants to look at NIRPC as being the one who can make this thing just automatically happen. NIRPC is not going to be the solution. The communities are going to be the solution coming to NIRPC with a unified voice saying: We're really willing to put up the funds or find local funding.

Just like Ty said, there has to be local funding. And if people are not willing to commit those funds -- George made a good comment earlier about the rail, about the South Shore. Some communities -- Congressman Visclosky didn't get all the communities to buy into that. What a wonderful idea of trying to connect us to Chicago for future generations. But not every community bought into that. Just like with regional transportation, you're not going to get 100% buy-in until everybody from those communities speak up to their elected officials and say "this is a priority for

economic development, for jobs and for future generations." You can't look to NIRPC to be the problem solver on this problem.

>> Is NIRPC's Board of Commissioners all elected officials?

>> Yes, it is.

>> We can say what we want, but that's who's on that Board. And that's why people look for NIRPC to lead the way.

>> But those communities are represented by one person at NIRPC. A lot of them aren't mayors. But they're elected officials.

>> STEVE WALSH: I think what he's saying, the reason Valparaiso has bus service, it started on the local level. The reason Gary made decisions on the local level. Segue into the bus service of East Chicago.

>> Again, my name is Frank Rosado from East Chicago Transit. Earlier this month, as Theresa talked about earlier, a group meets every month to discuss transit issues. The meeting we had earlier this year, I came up with an idea as a way for people to get their

elected officials to understand how important public transportation is to them. And it was very simple. Create a petition online. So that petition is still up and running.

So if anybody would like to sign up on this petition simply called We Support Public Transportation Northwest Indiana. Go on the GPTC website and get the link.

Theresa, do you have it attached to Everybody Counts? So if you go to any one of our websites, look for the link, and you'll be able to sign the petition. Pass it on to as many friends as you can. We've had it up for about a week and a half, and we're probably at about 100 people who have signed up. The number of hits that we've gotten is somewhere near 7 or 800. I'm not a web person. I can't tell you whether that is good, bad or what. But there have been almost 100 people that have emailed me back to tell me that they have signed the petition. So those are people in the audience, again, the Everybody Counts website, GPTC or East Chicago website. Look for the link. Go on and pass it on. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: Unfortunately, you were the last word on this. This is the end of this particular session. Of course, we will have a second session coming up at 5 o'clock here, gives you another whole opportunity until 7:30 to have your comments heard.

In the meantime, I think somebody mentioned public radio, get the word out on public radio. Well, speak of the devil, I'm with public radio, and I'm actually going to start recording my show for tomorrow starting at 4 o'clock. We're going to have folks from Everybody Counts, from NIRPC, some of the transit operators a little later. But we're also leaving time for people who want to get on. We won't get everybody on because it is a shortened show. But we invite people to stick around and listen. It will be a good discussion. Come out if you can.

In the meantime, I want to thank everybody. I thought this was a wonderful discussion. Thank you so much.

[Applause.]

STATE OF INDIANA)

) SS:

COUNTY OF LAKE)

I, Kathy A. Cortopassi, hereby certify that I was the Court Reporter and personally provided Verbatim Transcription Services for the NIRPC Public Hearing on October 29, 2014, and that I personally edited and do hereby attest that this transcript is a verbatim record of said meeting to the best of my ability.

Kathy A. Cortopassi

Kathy A. Cortopassi, RPR, RMR, CRR, CCP, CBC

Notary Public

