

NIRPC PUBLIC HEARING

WICKER MEMORIAL PARK SOCIAL CENTER

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>> We're going to be getting started shortly. We're just getting set up.

>> TY WARNER: All right. Thank you all for coming out tonight. I appreciate it. I know the weather has taken a turn for the worst. But, fortunately, right here in North Township, it's at least warm in this facility. So I'm glad you made it. Thank you for taking the time tonight. I know that's not always easy to do, to carve out the time. So your being here shows that you're obviously interested and passionate about this topic of public transportation and that's exactly what we want to capture tonight: Your passion, your thoughts, your ideas about how to improve and enhance public transportation in Northwest Indiana. So thank you for being here. Thank you for being willing to share those thoughts.

I'm Ty Warner. I'm Executive Director at NIRPC. I'll talk about what NIRPC is in just a minute. Let me just real quick run down how things will happen tonight.

The bulk of this evening will be Steve Walsh, who I will introduce formally in a minute, from Lakeshore Public Radio, and he will take us through the facilitated discussion to hear what your thoughts are, comments,

ideas, suggestions and solutions. So that will be the bulk of the evening.

But before we get there, we're giving some background information to transit Northwest Indiana. We'll have a quick welcome from Frank Myrvan, Jr. I'll talk a little bit about the background of NIRPC is -- what NIRPC is, what it does, why it exists. And then Belinda, from our NIRPC staff, will talk about the details of transit, how it gets funded, where transit, what the coverage area is in Northwestern Indian. She will go over that. We will have a statement from Everybody Counts, as well, before we move on. And then after that, we will be into the full discussion. So you can percolate your ideas as you're here in the background. And hopefully that will spark some thoughts that you will be willing to share.

A couple things I will say before I ask Frank to come up is everything that is happening tonight is being transcribed. There is a court stenographer behind me that you can see on the screen. That will be available in a transcript format. It will be posted on the NIRPC website, www.NIRPC.org. As soon as we get that back, we will post that up there. Also, this meeting is videotaped

and that will also be posted on the website. So those will be made available. Once again, that's www.NIRPC.org.

All right. With that, let me turn it over to Trustee Frank Myrvan, Jr. and thank you, thank the Township for hosting us in this space.

>> FRANK MYRVAN, JR.: I want to welcome everyone today, and I want to talk to you about -- obviously I'm the North Township Trustee. My name is Frank Myrvan -- and the state of affairs as far as public transportation world goes in my world.

Dial-a-Ride in 2012 did about 12,000 rides. Dial-a-Ride is an on-demand service. When the RBA no longer had funding, NIRPC and I got together and we were able to get a CMAC grant, which is a carbon monoxide reduction grant. Long story short, what that allows us to do is to be able to expand our services. And it is designed to allow us to set up a system that would allow us to go forward with funding.

And so what we've done is we've added the amount of rides that we've had. We've increased the amount of hours that we provide service. We created a public/private partnership with AAA. And we were able to say they handle

our overflow.

What we also have done is we were able to create a privatized dispatch center because on average, we received about 300 to 380 phone calls per day. And we also had outgoing calls to confirm. And we were unable to handle that volume. So we privatized that with Prompt Ambulance to be able to utilize their technology so that all those phone calls would be answered.

The by-product of that is that in 2014, this year, we are on target for doing 48,000 rides. So that means we pick you up, we take you to the store, we bring you back, that's two rides.

And so what is going on is that's a microcosm of the public transportation in Lake County. And we have been able to set the table on what is to be expected when we look forward to a system, a regional system, on how you have to be the most efficient and economical ways possible.

We're also looking and trying every day to bundle more riders on the bus. That means people have to allow more pickup time so that we drive down the cost per ride.

So our ultimate goal is to be able to provide that

service. And when we run out of money, we don't want to go to the old system of triaging or first-come, first-served as far as the priority list. There are people with dialysis, handicapped, a lot of people going to the doctor's office. The economy of transportation is -- as a pharmaceutical sales rep, I used to go and be at doctor's offices every day, and people would be waiting hours for a ride. Either a neighbor or a son or daughter or someone else would be picking that person up. Or even sometimes a cab. If you fit into that system, it would take hours.

So today's meeting I want to be very passionate. Second one. So I want to reiterate that the time has come where we need a regional transportation system that allows us to be able to provide efficiencies of transportation. And if it's a hybrid between public and private partnership, that's what needs to be done.

Currently, as far as fixed routes, buses, you have GPTC. Gary and East Chicago are the last people standing. So when you have that, that is the foundation in which we have to operate. There are also three on-demand or four on-demand services. We also have Valparaiso, which their numbers have increased, too.

But the bottom line is that in every thriving community in America, there's a transportation system that lifts people up, creates an economic bridge between jobs and people, and it also creates mobility and freedom for people.

So this meeting is specifically about a decree with Everybody Counts and NIRPC. One, I used an example earlier this afternoon, Raymond Fletcher, he's a friend of mine that needed transportation very often to get to different functions and different meetings. We did everything we can do. And when Ray would show up -- he's a paraplegic in a wheelchair -- when he would show up, he never wanted people to say, "Oh, that's great that you're here" or pay special attention to him. All that he wanted to have accomplished was that he wanted the right and the freedom to have the mobility and a system that was reliable enough to get him from Point A to Point B.

And I think that's all that we're looking for. We're looking for a system that provides the most efficient transportation possible that includes everyone's opinions. And also not empathize with but realize that there are handicapped individuals that need to be recognized and

they have the right, the freedom to mobility.

We have, I believe, over six or seven major universities in our region, Purdue Cal, IUN, Kaplan, Valparaiso, Ivy Tech, that's off the top of my head. In order to increase those numbers and provide an educational system, they're on board. Those chancellors know if you have a reliable public transportation system, it increases their enrollment. And when you have people going to college, because there's a transportation system, the output is that you have an educated workforce that brings in more development.

So at the very base of our economic development foundation, public transportation must be something that we put forth going forward.

NIRPC has new leadership with Mr. Ty Warner. When we get down to the bottom line of what this meeting is about, and I said this earlier, is that with new leaders, you have new beginnings. And we hope that this meeting brings together a consensus and collaboration moving forward so that we have economic development driven by NIRPC with collaboration with Everybody Counts in making sure that we're going down the path that we realize everybody's

needs and we work together to do that.

I welcome you to Wicker Park. I'll be here for the majority of the rest of the meeting. If you have any questions for me, please ask. And I thank you guys for participating in this system. And as a leader in the community, I'm going to commit myself to doing everything I can to keep putting transportation on the table and seeing that we move it forward. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> TY WARNER: Thank you. As Frank alluded to, this meeting stems out of a Settlement Agreement with Everybody Counts, a legal action that they took. And we agreed to hold this meeting, mutually thinking this could be an opportunity to get great background on how transport works, what is needed to be able to expand it in Northwest Indiana, and as a forum to get your thoughts and ideas, which is why we're here tonight.

Let me give you some background on NIRPC. I know the first time I heard that, I thought it was a pretty funny. Used to be the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, so you have NPC changed and NIRPC still exists.

Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission has been

around since 1965. Its primary function is it is the Council of Governments for Northwestern Indiana. And it covers a three-county area, so not just Lake County, but Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties, so all 41 municipalities within that three-county area.

And those three counties themselves all have representatives, municipalities and counties that are on the Board of NIRPC. It is your elected officials that you elect that come to NIRPC and deliberate on things that are bigger than themselves, the region in nature, there's a place for everybody to come to the table and talk about those things. That's essentially what NIRPC is at its core.

It serves a very important federal function as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO. And I promise I think that's the last acronym that I'm going to throw at you this evening. But the MPO is a legally-required entity whenever an area anywhere in the United States exceeds 50,000 in population in an urban area specifically. But over 50,000, an MPO gets formed and gets designated. That serves the function, in very simple terms, of taking Federal funds, Federal transportation

funds, and bringing them to the local level where locally decisions can be made on what to do with those Federal funds.

An important thing to note in that whole picture, which I realized when I talk to folks about MPO that it isn't always clear where those funding things come from, is that it's not as if NIRPC, although there is a lot of money involved in what NIRPC touches, it's not as if NIRPC is sitting on a large pile of cash just deciding what to dole out. There is a match requirement. NIRPC helps access Federal funds.

So on the local level, you have to generate those local funds, identify those local sources of funding, and then NIRPC can help access the Federal funds by matching those local funds to what's available on the Federal level. That's how we get road projects funded. That's how we get transit funded. And that's really essentially the mechanics of this.

So when we looked for solutions, that's what we need to try to think about is how do we find those sources of funding as well as make all the dots connect and connect the pieces to try to grow a regional transit system in

Northwestern Indiana and enhance the systems that we have?

So, with that said, let me turn it over Belinda Petroskey. She will walk you through transit funding and how it works.

I will mention with this PowerPoint, if it's not already on the NIRPC website, it will be there any soon. Anybody who wants a copy of this PowerPoint, we can make it available to you in whatever format you need, especially if you need a large print or something, we can make that available.

That said, Belinda will describe everything on every slide. So it's not as if you won't be able to get that information that is on the slide if you have trouble seeing it.

Here is the microphone.

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: Thank you very much. I'll get over here and get my little clicker. I'm going to go through these slides. It's basically Public Transit 101, for those of you who don't know some of the more esoteric details, but important ones. Let me get out of the way.

Okay. Ty just talked a little bit about our MPO role, the Metropolitan Planning Organization. That designation

requires us to do certain things, the most important of which is develop the long-range transportation plan. And that plan contains goals and objectives and priorities, expansions. The short range plan transportation improvement program contains the -- that's where the criteria are developed based on the goals and objectives and priorities. And then the project selection and programming, that's how we determine where the transit money, in this case, transit or the highway or bridge, the different funding activities, how they get selected.

Our second role is something that's not done by all the MPOs. We are a designated recipient. What that means is that we file a grant or grants to the Federal Transit Administration on behalf of seven of the public transit operators. Quite a while ago FTA came to NIRPC and asked us to do this because they didn't want to take a lot of grants from small providers. So we do a consolidated grant.

And that means we have some responsibilities and duties, including administrative oversight of the operators for compliance with federal rules and regulations, including the ADA, receive and pass through

funds for all seven. And we submit an annual grant at location and conduct the financial oversight and the quarterly reports for that.

How it's funded. Basically there are three sources routinely shared across the board by all operators. Some operators will have other sources, as well, depending upon what they're doing. Local support comes from a variety of places. Each operator, depending upon where they are, gets it from different sources. But generally it includes fares, municipal property taxes, other federal programs, County Economic Development Income Tax, the CEDIT, or property taxes. State support comes from Public Mass Transit Fund, which is a small portion of the sales tax dedicated to public transit, and then Federal support from the Federal Transit Administration. And then under state support, NICTD, the South Shore, also has a dedicated source of funds that are sales tax based.

Types of transit. There are lots and lots of different types of transit out there, but basically we have four here in the region:

Fixed route, which most of you would recognize is established routes and stops and fares.

The complementary paratransit, that's a requirement from the ADA that fixed route operators have to follow where they have to provide service in the same vicinity that they're providing the fixed route for folks who cannot get out to the bus stop. Now, those riders have to qualify for the service. You have to have your doctor fill out the forms. And register. When you're registered, then you can -- that's a curb-to-curb, door-to-door service if you cannot access the fixed route regular stops.

Demand response, available in areas, several different areas in the region. And it may be available to the general public or it can be limited to elderly and disabled. And then the fares and hours are set individually by each operator.

And then we have, of course, commuter and passenger rail.

Existing operators. We have the direct recipients. That means these entities apply directly to FTA for their Federal funds. And that's the Gary Public Transportation Corporation, Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, or South Shore, and Michigan City Transit.

Our subgrantees or subrecipients, the ones that NIRPC applies for the funding for, are: East Chicago Transit, North Township Dial-a-Ride, South Lake County Community Services, Opportunity Enterprises, Porter County Aging and Community Services, Valparaiso Transit and LaPorte TransPorte.

Northwest Indiana gets between 10-1/2 and 11, 11-1/2 million dollars annually in the 5307 program, which is the primary source of Federal money that the operators use to basically maintain them and operate their systems. So it's operating money. PM is preventive maintenance. And then capital.

The Lake County operators' amounts that they get from the program, starting with Gary Public Transportation, get about \$5.2 million in '14. The South Shore got \$3.5 million. East Chicago, \$603,000. South Lake County Community Services, \$533,000. And North Township Dial-a-Ride, 181,000.

Section 5307 in Porter County: Valparaiso, for both their fixed route and their Chicago Dash service, they get \$695,000. Porter County for their demand response gets \$311,953, and Opportunity Enterprises, also demand

response, gets \$215,000.

On this, we're showing how reliant the operators are on different segments of the funding stream here. In 2012, the fixed route complementary paratransit, as you see, it was 44% Federally funded, 40% local money, and 16% from the state.

The 2013 numbers are similar, although they got more Federal money and needed less local money, and state stayed the same.

Demand response, on the other hand, is a lot more dependent on the local funding, as you see there, 57%. Federal's only 21. And they get a little more state help at 22%.

And in 2013, not much difference. State percent went up to 31, so local came down to 41. Little more Federal at 28%.

These are the ridership numbers for 2012 and 2013. I included them in here just to show the systems are fairly stable. We have -- they're providing consistent numbers. All of them do a whole lot more with a lot more money. NICTD, of course, is the big operation in the three-county area, of course, at 3.6 million both years. A little bit

less in '13. GPTC doing well at 719,000 for 2013, an increase over '12. East Chicago showing a slight increase over '12, and Valparaiso has gone up considerably and continues to do so.

Opportunity Enterprises, also about a 5,000 rider increase. South Lake County Community Services, a slight decrease. They -- and if you look at Porter County Community Services -- both register a decline in ridership, and both experienced problems in 2013 with funding. So you see a decrease in service reflected there.

And then North Township, of course, you heard Frank talk about the increase. That's just one year, from 10,994 in '12 and they were up to 32,999 in '13. Taken over what was the RBA service area.

Michigan City and LaPorte, ridership again, very stable and going up slightly. So we can show it demonstrating continuing ongoing need for transit.

Total ridership by bus and demand response 1.3 million, a little bit over for '13. And then the NICTD number.

Where is transit available? Transit is available where people will pay for it. That's important to understand.

Where people have committed to paying for it with a local match.

LaPorte County, you see the fixed route transit, Michigan City, the City of LaPorte has a demand response.

Porter County fixed route is the Valparaiso line there.

And then the hash mark box there on the right shows that demand response is available county wide from those two providers there.

Lake County fixed route, you see Gary and East Chicago routes there, Gary dropping down to Crown Point and through Merrillville there.

And then Lake County demand response and paratransit, you can see the blue area both in the county inset and then the other side, that Southlake County serves about two-thirds of Lake County. The only place they don't go is Gary and North Township.

And if you look at this over here, the hash marks and everything, that's service in the complementary paratransit area. You have to go 3/4 of a mile on either side of your route. And then East Chicago, their 3/4 mile boundary up there. And then it gives you that funky green color. That means there's also, on top of that, then the

North Township Dial-a-Ride. So you've got lots of transit available. Is it enough? No. We could use more.

How to contact NIRPC? There we are. NIRPC by email. nirpc@nirpc.org. Telephone number, 219-763-6060. And then the postal, our address. 6100 Southport Road, Portage, Indiana.

I'm sorry, I forgot we're online, www.NIRPC.org. We're on Facebook and Twitter.

>> TY WARNER: Thank you, Belinda.

I think that may have generated a lot of questions and a lot of fodder for discussion, but I'd ask you to be patient for just a little bit because you'll have an opportunity to have as much discussion as you care to have.

Let me hand the microphone to Executive Director of Everybody Counts, Theresa Torres.

>> THERESA TORRES: Thank you, and I am going to be brief. Some of your faces I know, some of them I don't. And some people we talked on the phone. So I wanted to make sure you understood. We're more than just the people that brought the pizza that came in when you came in. Everybody Counts is a nonprofit agency. And we were

fighting for the rights of people with disabilities and senior citizens for the last 25 years. We're very proud of the positive relationships and collaboration that we have with a number of entities in the community. We also take very great pride in anything that we're directly involved in.

So it was important, and my Board asked me to clarify, that there's been some misinformation out there that indicated that we were involved in -- or we were co-hosting or co-sponsoring this event. That's incorrect. We certainly appreciate NIRPC's willingness to let us provide these statements and participate to the extent that we have.

The first thing I want to do is I really want to thank -- I didn't get the chance this morning to thank Township Trustee Frank Myrvan, Jr., for setting the tone for our meeting. That was just awesome.

There is a quick history. The reason we're today is the lawsuit was filed. 20 years ago, we started hearing from people with disabilities and people who were senior citizens at Everybody Counts, and they were having some real problems with the transit systems, aside from the

fact that they were fragmented, they were having some trouble with compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which some of you know will be 25 years old next year.

Some of the people who, in order to file a class action lawsuit, you have to have people who are willing to put their name on the dotted line. And we want to recognize and acknowledge those people who did so. That was kind of a scary thing. I'm sure you could understand that. And so I want to acknowledge them.

And none of our efforts on behalf of the class, people with disabilities and senior citizens in Lake County, would have been possible without the ongoing pro bono, that means free for y'all that don't know pro bono, support from the law firm of Jenner and Block. And our attorney, Mr. Steve Cyrus, is here with us this evening. We want to thank him so much for his help.

Our primary goal was ADA compliance. But we also hoped to get the local transit providers and decisionmakers, funders to understand how very important it was not only to comply with the ADA but also to work with the people that we said were the real stake holders, and that's you

guys, the people who need public transit or use public transit.

And the good news is: That's happening in some circles. We hope it will continue. Gary Public Transit, the North Township Trustees, Dial-a-Ride service and East Chicago Public Transit are working directly with representatives of the disability community, sitting down, working monthly. And together they have gotten a great deal accomplished.

Some of you here rode the bus. That was a direct result of their collaboration. Sometimes people say that things will never change, but I think we all agree it's time for them to change here.

We know you got important things to say. We're going to encourage you. Please don't be intimidated by language or terms you don't understand. You are the real stakeholders here. So be sure to share your thoughts and your ideas because we need them. You guys are the real important folks. These guys are here to serve you. They can't do that without you letting them know what you need. So please do that tonight. Thanks.

[Applause.]

>> TY WARNER: All right. At this point, that's a lot of good background information, I hope. I'm going to now turn it over to Steve Walsh from Lakeshore Public Media, who has very graciously agreed to facilitate tonight. And I'm giving the microphone to him. We will also have wherever Allen is. Allen will be roving around with this microphone to help with the projection of whatever comments, questions, et cetera, you have and the context of it. Steve Walsh from Lakeshore Public Media.

>> STEVE WALSH: I'm Steve Walsh with Lakeshore Public Radio. I'm a journalist and I host their program "Regionally Speaking" at 1:00. I actually recorded a show between sessions. That will be airing tomorrow at 1:00 if you're interested in listening in.

It's been a pretty spirited debate so far, a good discussion. A lot of good information came out of the first session. I expect great things here.

I'm going to try to keep a light a footprint as humanly possible. I'll try to interject as little as I can. There are certain ground rules. We're supposed to stick to three minutes. We were pretty liberal about that in the last session. Really, the idea is that everyone gets

a chance to speak at least once before we worry about someone speaking twice. And we'll try to, you know, give enough time for everybody to speak.

Other than that, the whole idea behind this, and I think they already indicated, this is all about trying to find out people's opinions of the service, the way it is right now, as well as thoughts on how it might be improved or how it might change.

So let's get right to it. Have people go ahead and raise their hands when they're interested in talking. Right in the front row.

>> SHIRLEY LIXON: Hi, I'm Shirley Lixon. I live in Hammond. I don't drive. It's been very wonderful knowing that we have great people to help us. The Township has been fantastic. And Gary Works, I can't tell you how happy I am with these buses coming in. We do need more buses running in more areas because it's horrible when you have no transportation and you cannot get out. You feel like you're a prisoner in your own home.

So we're just happy. And we want things to get better. And one of the things I could suggest right now is with the Gary Transportation is, there is not enough

advertisement about it. There are so many people who do not know about the bus. You talk to them and they look at you with a puzzled look.

Now, there are places like Strack's and there are Walmart, there is Ultra, there is libraries, YMCAs. There are places where information could be posted where the general public could see it because not everybody has a computer at their disposal. So there needs to be much more information out there.

And as far as the Township, they do put the information out in free, little flyers and papers as well as through the mail to us. I'm just so happy for what we have and I'm looking forward to the hopes that we can have more service down the road. Thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: How often do you use the buses?

>> SHIRLEY LIXON: I use Dial-a-Ride at least six, seven times a month. I use Gary buses at least three times a week. I mean, they're there and I'm going to use them.

I tell everybody hey, get out there and support Gary buses. And support the Township because the Township does a fantastic job for all of us. Because I myself, I don't

know where I would be. If it wasn't for the Township stepping up to plate, I would have had to move completely out of the area. So I appreciate it. This meeting is appreciated. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: Who's next?

>> ALICE FLORES: My name is Alice Flores. I am the wife of John R. Flores that has been dead now 10 years. So we don't have a precinct committeeman anymore. In North Hammond, I am living in the most polluted section that you could imagine. I have lived there all my life. I'm 75 years old, and I've been walking 2-1/2 years wherever I want to go because sometimes I can make a call, but they don't want to come. So I go walking.

As for funding, we've got all the businesses in downtown Hammond. But now we've got money-making recyclers, and gun powder, and what else? And Phillips that put all around our south shore. And all these are really dangerous. There's families there. At least mine are fully grown and gone. But I care for my neighbors. They still have little kids.

>> STEVE WALSH: You lived in this area for a long time.

Have you been walking since the last 2-1/2 years?

>> ALICE FLORES: Yes. I've been living there since 1950.

>> STEVE WALSH: So what happened in the last 2-1/2 years?

>> ALICE FLORES: The 2-1/2 years, there has been many -- well, you have to come to my house and see all the damage that was done. There was a common house they used to have people that used to party, do drugs on my front yard. And -- I'm not used to this.

And now I have a recycler. And he's not the owner. The owner is in Florida. I called him if you're in that place for a condemned house and work 3-1/2 years fixing that house. Right and left I told them you better remove your ladders because it's affecting my furnace.

>> STEVE WALSH: So you got some issues going on with your neighborhood, and transit is one of them.

>> ALICE FLORES: So we have a lot of problems in that corner. And nobody, ever since my husband died, we don't have a precinct committeeman that's active. The one that operates, this is all the time, don't even call. He doesn't, he's not over there. And I have a lot of

problems and I wanted to see them solved before I die. I pay a thousand dollars on my house for what? I went to the state and county, just ignore me. They said talk to the South Shore. I went to the South Shore. I talked to the city. So I went from one to one and nobody has helped me. Nobody. Well, I'm 75. I could die, anyway. But I don't want that the way it is because that recycler does whatever he wants. Okay? And that's a money maker. That's another money maker. And then the gun powder, I walk all the way and I saw them. The gun powder factory is matches and gun powder and all tons of garbage just like Amsted Steel and there's pollution.

>> STEVE WALSH: So you kind of feel you're not being listened to for a variety of reasons.

>> ALICE FLORES: Yes. I went to the mayor and he didn't even want to talk to me. He doesn't want to talk to me. So I said eventually I'll get it out. And I want to get it out before I die because that corner - oh, and the latest, we had a tremor from the South Shore, the earth moved. And now the South Shore said it never happened. The woman across the street from me and gave her a fence and put some sod and fixed the side of the

house. And me? Nothing. And I ended up with a crack right in the middle of my furnace because the furnace got the earth came up and there's a halo where they came up because of the excessive water coming from the outside. And I just need help. And I went to lawyers, but in Hammond everybody says they can't help me.

>> STEVE WALSH: Sounds like you have a lot of issues. I'm not sure that they're totally transit-related.

>> ALICE FLORES: And then the only way I could get away -- I used to go to Whiting. I used to go to Munster. I have my doctors all in Munster and all the ones in Whiting. I haven't seen the doctor in a long time.

>> STEVE WALSH: Because you can't get there?

>> ALICE FLORES: Because there is no transportation. And there's people that are mostly and that's all right.

>> STEVE WALSH: You say you live in North Township?

>> ALICE FLORES: In North Hammond.

>> STEVE WALSH: Did you ever use the Trustee's Dial-a-Ride service?

>> ALICE FLORES: Yes. Sometimes.

>> STEVE WALSH: But they can't get to your doctor's appointment?

>> ALICE FLORES: They don't go to Munster 45, 7, 15, 45. They used to take me by the South Shore and I had to walk over. But most of the time I get a ride before. But now, you can't talk them into it. And I'm tired of trying. That's why I said this is my last time that we can have to get the bus. We need it. My husband would have expected it of me. I have children in Afghanistan, Andrew, and Pauly is in New Mexico right now.

>> STEVE WALSH: Well, thank you.

[Applause.]

>> ALICE FLORES: That's why I'm here. If I can help, I will.

>> PHYLLIS: My name is Phyllis, and I live in North Hammond. And I'm getting tired all the time, at least four times a week, of having to walk 15 blocks to get down to downtown Hammond, the Strack's grocery store, to get the Gary bus if I want to go to Walmart. And so far, the Gary bus has been great. It takes us to a lot of areas in South Hammond. North Hammond, they don't worry about us. And once I get to Strack's, if I want to go to Illinois and go to a PACE bus, I got better service in Illinois to the PACE buses to get right to the front door of every

store I want to go to that I can't get to in Hammond or in the Schererville area or Griffith or wherever I want to go to Indiana, and I'm spending more of my money in Illinois, and I'd like to spend it more in the local area. And I'm getting tired of walking 15 blocks round-trip.

>> STEVE WALSH: So it's easier for you to connect to go into Illinois and do all your shopping?

>> PHYLLIS: And before they came and helped us, I was having to take the South Shore train, go to East Chicago, wait an hour for the East Chicago bus, just to get to the Hammond Walmart before the Gary buses came. And that's how I solved my problem. But, still, it was easier in Illinois to go to the Walmart store because the bus went right to the front door.

>> STEVE WALSH: How long does it take you get to Walmart from your home?

>> PHYLLIS: When I did take the East Chicago bus to get to Walmart, an hour and a half. But I got to the front door of Walmart. But now I take the Gary bus because it's a lot easier. But the East Chicago bus and the train was more reliable. And I wish they would get the bus back in Hammond the way they were three years ago

because then they were almost perfect. They only had two problems.

>> STEVE WALSH: Tell me the two problems.

>> PHYLLIS: That's all I got to say.

>> STEVE WALSH: Fair enough. Who's next?

>> LATASHA ROBERTSON: Hi, my name is Latasha Robertson. I stay in North Hammond. Three years ago, we had transportation to get to the little places that it did take us. Them taking away the bus service was bad for me for the simple fact my sons -- both my sons go to Hammond High School. There is only one school bus that goes to Hammond High School. And because we're not in their radius, my boy's not allowed to get on the bus to go to school. So they're walking 13 blocks to school and 13 blocks home from school because we are a quarter of a mile off from them getting on the city -- the school bus.

>> STEVE WALSH: 13 blocks away and you can't get on the school bus?

>> LATASHA ROBERTSON: You have to be 1.5 miles. We are 1.4-point-something-something miles. But I see all these elderly people out here walking. That's a sad thing to see. The aid office, the Dallas Center, the Social

Security office, everything is downtown Hammond. We have no way to get downtown. I'm watching these people walk on a daily basis, walking downtown Hammond.

But like I said, about my boys, when the wintertime comes, what parent wants their child walking in the snow? Having to miss days because there's blizzards outside, the snow is too deep, it's too cold. They can't get on the bus because it's a quarter of a mile off. We need buses. We need them.

>> STEVE WALSH: What do you think would work?

>> LATASHA ROBERTSON: I don't know. I think more fundraisers. If the City of Hammond came together and worked as a city and just not depended on the Federal and local alone because that's really not working. They are really not listening to us. They really don't care. They got cars and gas money. They got a way to get to work. It's us, the people that don't have it. So they are the people who need to come together and do whatever it takes, -- stickers or potluck or any kind of event to raise money because we need the buses.

>> STEVE WALSH: Do people go to Hammond City Hall and talk?

>> LATASHA ROBERTSON: You can only talk to the Mayor on Mayor's Night. That's the only way you will ever reach him.

>> STEVE WALSH: Have you been? Have you talked to him?

>> LATASHA ROBERTSON: I been to Mayor's Night.

Nothing has changed. You can go to City Hall. They give you runaround, tell you to go talk to this office or talk to that person. By the time the day is over with, you will need a full-time job just to get a bus. And that's sad, because you are working for us. We are paying taxes. I pay taxes in my house. I pay taxes to live there. And there is no way that something I say should be ignored.

>> STEVE WALSH: I don't know if I pointed it out, but also folks from NIRPC here, they will answer questions if they can. This is their purview. They'll take questions. So if you have them, feel free to express them. Who is next?

>> ELAINE JACKSON: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Elaine Jackson. I work for Everybody Counts. I am an advocate for people with disabilities and seniors. And I am an advocate for transportation. I believe that all my heart we need a regional public transportation

system. We need NIRPC support to support Gary Public Transportation, who is the largest system that's already in place. That it just makes more sense. Why do you reinvent the wheel when you already have it? All we need is somebody to help push the wheel along. They have the equipment, the buses, the facilities to take care of the buses, they have the staff. So there's no logical reason that they wouldn't be the ones that you would turn to, to do your -- make your regional -- be your regional transit people.

Everything is fragmented now. You need one system when you can make one phone call, have the same hours of service. You are talking to folks from all across different communities. And they're taking you to and from different places. And it's just one local thing, not having to call this thing and connect with this company and then wait three hours and connect with that company. Just one regional system would work beautifully for everybody and make it a whole lot easier for our community.

[Applause.]

>> CARL: Hi, my name is Carl. I'd like to say a

couple of different things. Better or more frequent service or better service to connect to the Chicago transit system, even if we had maybe either half hour bus service from, say, the Dan Rabin Plaza in Hammond to the 95th Street Red Line, something so we can get into the city.

The other thing I'm concerned about for a personal issue is the East Chicago bus system does not have bike racks on the front of the buses. It seems like every other bus system I've ever seen has bike racks.

I don't know why the East Chicago bus stops like four blocks from my house, and I can't use it. Take my bike, get up further, the route could be adjusted. I'm not sure why we don't have that ability to put our bikes on the front of the buses.

>> STEVE WALSH: How often do you use public transit right now? How often do you use the buses right now?

>> CARL: Not as often as I'd like. I probably would be more apt to use the transportation if it was -- how to say it? If it connected better to my needs.

>> STEVE WALSH: And a lot of that is just revolving around your need to be able to get into Chicago?

>> CARL: Correct. I work up in the City. And it's difficult for me to get there.

It would also be nice to get up there on the weekends, even, some sort of Saturday service that would connect up into the City.

>> STEVE WALSH: How do you get to work now if you don't use the buses?

>> CARL: I have somebody that can drive me up to the train station. Or I just try to get up there myself. The East Chicago bus stops, but it's only from the K-Mart plaza in Griffith and only takes you to the South Shore station. The route doesn't come back. Then the route from the South Shore station goes up and takes like a route through the town of East Chicago, through the Harbor and then it comes all the way back to Griffith.

>> STEVE WALSH: So it's a big loop. You live in Griffith?

>> CARL: I live in Highland right off of Cline Avenue.

>> STEVE WALSH: But you are able to make use of some of the bus services? A little bit.

>> CARL: I appreciate that they finally got the bus system going again because I could take it from Ultra and

head north that way. But the East Chicago bus is literally two, three blocks from my house.

>> STEVE WALSH: So a lot of times you end up making a friend to get you to work and everything.

>> CARL: I do whatever I can.

>> STEVE WALSH: Be really nice to that guy.

All right. Who's next?

Everybody came out on a weekday here in the evening. I know you probably wanted to say something. Even Dennis Rittenmeyer wanted to say something. All right, Dennis? Do you know anything about buses, Dennis?

>> DENNIS RITTENMEYER: My name is Dennis Rittenmeyer. For those of you that don't know the joke, I chaired the Regional Bus Authority for about 10 years. And today we're worse off than we were when I started. I'm not proud of that fact.

The position I have, I do have questions. I have a couple things to say first.

My current position is Executive Director of One Region, which is a three-county-wide effort to get elected officials and others to, as I refer to it, play nice in the sandbox and get something done that improves the

quality of life for our citizens.

Our most recent report, 2012, had trend indicators of the 10 indicators of quality of life. Transportation was 1 of 2 of 10 that was a negative trend line. In other words, we're worse off now than we were 10 years ago.

I want to commend Trustee Frank Myrvan, not for the use of this room -- although that was very nice of you, Frank, thank you very much -- but for what he said, because he was the first person to say what we need is a regional system, a regional system that makes it possible for people to go where they need to go with a minimum amount of hassle.

There aren't a lot of elected officials here. I would commend NIRPC Chairman, Mr. Brian Snedecor, for being here today. I worked with the Mayor for years, and he has been an advocate for regional transportation. I grew up in his city. I grew up in his city. And I used to be able to take a Gary Public Transportation bus from Hobart to downtown Gary where my father's business was before I was old enough to drive a car.

>> ALICE FLORES: I do not want the bus line listen to me and don't ever talk to me. I don't want it and you

will not have it.

>> DENNIS RITTENMEYER: I don't understand, but may I finish?

>> ALICE FLORES: He's not an advocate. He does not want the bus. I don't know why.

>> DENNIS RITTENMEYER: I'm not sure what that's all about.

>> She feels that the Mayor is the one that got the buses out of Hammond.

>> DENNIS RITTENMEYER: Not this mayor.

>> She thinks you're talking about McDermott. That's what she's trying to say.

>> DENNIS RITTENMEYER: Well, Mayor McDermott -- to be fair, Mayor McDermott yielded his system to the then Regional Bus Authority that ran the system better in the sense of more efficiency, more economies, more services that was run under the auspices of the then Regional Bus Authority, which, because our elected officials, your representative, your elected officials would not come up with the money, failed. That's why we don't have that bus system.

To their credit, GPTC is running what they can of that

service right now.

I told you I had a question. Here's my question. And I would love to have somebody in this room answer this question. Does anybody seated here today, do any of you care what name is on the side of the bus? Tell me if you do. Does anybody care what name is on the side of the bus?

>> [Audience in Unison:] No.

>> DENNIS RITTENMEYER: Steve, I hope you report that. No one cares. No one cares. And yet we continue to fight among ourselves over who's going to run transportation. And the end result is, as has been said many times, we have a fragmented system with different providers providing services in a relatively small geographic area that requires you, as users, to negotiate with different providers to go across community lines.

The only people, the only people who care about these political jurisdictions, the only people are elected officials.

You think about where you live, where you work, if you do, where you access medical care, where you shop, you go back and forth across those boundaries all the time. But

our public transportation systems don't do that. So it's a horrific mismatch. It has been for years, and it's not getting any better.

One way for it to get better is for you to contact your elected officials and make it clear to them you don't care whose name is on the side of the bus. You want to be able to go where you need to go and when you need to get there. That's been the problem and continues to be the problem. And the answer is: Our local mayors. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> I don't need no microphone.

>> ALLEN HAMMOND: This is being recorded. Yeah, we definitely need to use a microphone.

>> I can totally understand where he was coming from when he talked about the elected official. But every elected official you talk to, pretty much they feed you the same line. I'm not a Democrat or Republican, whatever they want to be, my thing is we are human beings. We are humans just like everybody else. If you got a way -- if I got a job, I'm telling you I got a job, but I'm telling you that I'm down on my luck and all I need is a start to get me a car to not be able to have to depend on that bus

again. I should not have to go to 15 different offices or talk to the people at odds with each other in order to get some kind of help to get to this job so I can be self-sufficient. That's all I'm saying.

I don't care whose name goes on the bus. What I'm saying is if I go to you as my elected official and I say: I've got a \$15 an hour job. I want to be a self-sufficient, self-independent person. I don't want to be on Welfare. I don't want to get food stamps. I don't want to depend on Township, bless their heart. It should be -- as my elected official, you say, let me go take a vote and see how many other people feel like this or are in this same position so we can get them some help. That's what I'm saying.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: I suspended my role of having everybody talk once before people talk again, but --

>> Hi, I'm new to this cause. I'm not really familiar with any solutions or anything. But I recently became a staffing supervisor, so I, both directly and indirectly, help a lot of the people, the elderly and disabled, in the Hammond/East Chicago area, also a little bit in Gary,

sometimes in Portage. It's a homecare agency.

And the biggest problem I have found that I cannot help anyone with is transportation. We don't just have people who need to go to the store to buy the things they need. We don't just have the people who need to get their pharmaceuticals from the pharmacy. We have people who actively have cancer and have not had their chemo port flushed in four months because the closest people to them work during the day because they're their neighbors. They only have friends, but their friends can't drive. We have people who cannot visit their husbands in nursing homes and are devastated because every time they see them, their rapid decline has become so severe.

We have people who are approved for free dentures when they need them, but they can't get from Hammond to the only -- the nearest dental office that will do this for them is in Crown Point. And they have no way to get there.

That was my breaking point where I said I need to figure this out. Because I had a client lived in Hammond who could not get to Crown Point. The closest I could find for him was a minimum of \$25 for the first 10 miles.

After that, it's per mile. And they don't have any money. These people are getting funding from -- the people are not. We are paid by the state to help these people. They don't have \$100 laying around to put a deposit down on some transportation company.

AAA transportation has been wonderful as far as I've seen. I've had to go out in the field and help people get to their doctor's appointments, but legally I cannot drive them because of my position. AAA transportation, your best bet is if you have Medicare. If you don't qualify for Medicare, if your payer source is SSBG, I know some of this doesn't make any sense to you, but if your payor source is not Medicare, chances are you cannot get AAA transportation unless you pay for it. And if you pay for it, you may not be able to buy food. You may not be able to pay for the prescriptions that are not covered by your insurance.

There are several problems that are all directly connected to transportation. And it kills me every day when I have someone who cannot get to the doctor appointment because they have no way to be transported there. Their family lives in Ohio. Or they don't have

any money. Some of these people are all alone on their own. So there needs to be a solution.

And it does have to be regional. It has to be county-wide because I cannot tell you how disheartening it is to tell this person that they cannot get to their very important doctor appointment three towns over because I can't get them the transportation myself, and there's no one else that can do it for them for free.

>> STEVE WALSH: Are you from this area?

>> I live in Lansing; however, I work in Indiana. I work in Schererville. We service basically all of Lake County. And we do have a few people in Porter County.

>> STEVE WALSH: What's your experience in Illinois, in Lansing? Is there a lack of transportation in Lansing?

>> I don't know about the transportation in Lansing specifically, but I've never needed it. That's not my point. There are people who need this. And there is no system that is working for many of my clients.

>> STEVE WALSH: You thought about driving people yourself; but with liability and everything, you can't do it?

>> Legally with my job I cannot do it and admit to it

because there is the liability. Plus, most of these doctor's appointments are during my 9 to 5 workday.

>> STEVE WALSH: What are these people doing? People are skipping their treatments?

>> Yes. I have a woman who has not been to the doctor seven months. Like I said, four months since her chemo flush. She actively has cancer. There is no reason she should be missing her appointments. These people need these services. We do -- my staff are able to run errands for these people.

But we're getting funding from the state. That gives them a total of hours by the month. So if you have 20 hours a month, that averages out to about five hours a week. And you wouldn't think it takes anything if you have your own car and you drive to the store and you pick up your pharmaceuticals or you drive and get your toilet paper that you ran out of. We're just doing regular grocery shopping.

But I don't know about you guys, but when I have to shop for a whole household, that takes two hours. So when you have two days of service, that's 2-1/2 hours of time, on a month like November when you only have four days each

weekday, that's not a lot of time to get to and from a doctor's appointment where you have to wait extra time or you have to see the doctor.

Most of the time you are in the doctor's office, the actual room, how many times are you sitting there for 20 minutes before he comes in? How much of that time is actually spent with the doctor? And then you have to wait on AAA transportation or some other transportation company to take you back.

>> STEVE WALSH: The state will pay to have you come there and kind of help them as much as you can, but it won't pay to get them to the doctor?

>> From what I understand, the state no longer funds transportation. But, again, I am new to the cause. I'm new to this area in Indiana. This is a fairly new job for me. I've only been in this position four or five months.

>> STEVE WALSH: But it's been a rough four or five months, at least with transportation.

All right. Who's next?

>> ALICE FLORES: I wanted to ask you a question. See why he dropped the Second District. The Second District is no more. I say, wait a minute, when he has the

meetings just never one for Second. Not just Third, Five.

>> STEVE WALSH: The mayor?

>> ALICE FLORES: Yes.

>> KEN STEVENSON: My name is Ken Stevenson. I live in Schererville, Indiana. I'm the owner of Classic Taxi out of Schererville. We run all over Lake County, somewhat into Illinois, somewhat into Porter County. My thought is, like you said, we need to have a regional transportation system. We need to think regionally and we need to be all on the same page of music.

What that means is we shouldn't necessarily have Gary or East Chicago or Hammond or whatever. We probably should be PACE and Metra. And NIRPC and the Chicago Metropolitan Planning Commission should be working together to expand the Metra and the PACE system over here. That way we would all have bus system at least of the same quality that they have in Illinois.

>> STEVE WALSH: We can't even go from East Chicago to Munster, but you will go across the state line?

>> KEN STEVENSON: What I'm saying is the planning and the expansion and how they work out how it should be expanded would be under the realm of PACE. We would turn

the control over to PACE. It wouldn't be under Hammond. It wouldn't be under NIRPC. It would be under PACE and Metra. And that way it would be truly a regional transportation authority.

And it wouldn't -- you know, we talk about where the boundary is. There is a boundary at the state line, too. And people in Hammond should be able to move as easily to Cal City as East Chicago. What difference does it make if it's a state line or county line or a city line? You should be able to go both ways.

And then when that system comes over here, there's buses in Illinois. The cost to run the bus in Illinois is half the cost as it is here. They run buses much more efficiently than we do here as far as bus per rider. We should use their planning and experience to do that.

When we talked about putting the South Shore line for the first time in 30 years, they sent out 11 lines. They have 11 times more experience than we have. And the same thing with the buses. Their buses have expanded. If you look at Naperville and Aurora, they have 350,000 people, with the same population density, with the same ethnic makeup, with the same economic makeup we have here. They

have a rail line that runs right down the middle of those two areas, and they have a PACE bus that supports their largest employers. In that area, they have 3,000 taxis. Here we have less than 50 in Lake, Porter and LaPorte County. They know how to run public transportation over there.

>> STEVE WALSH: I was making a small joke, but it's clear some people here use the Illinois system because it's easier to get around in Illinois than Indiana.

Is there anybody from NIRPC who can talk a little bit about the whole notion of whether or not you could go across state lines and just join a system that's far more well-established and has its own funding source? Does PACE want Northwest Indiana?

>> TY WARNER: I think PACE did at one point cross the state line at some point. They still do?

>> They still run people from Gary to the UPS center off of 55 and 294.

You run a bus from Gary from the Grant Street area.

>> When the RBA was functioning, they did approach the transit organizations in Chicago and asked them if they would be interested in taking over the services in

Northwest Indiana. The cost at that time was more than double what was currently being spent on all our transportation systems. We couldn't afford what they wanted us to pay. That's why the RBA didn't go that direction.

>> TY WARNER: Thanks for raising the question. Again, we're about trying to find ideas, and that's clearly trying to find a solution.

>> RUDY VELASCO: Hi, I'm Rudy Velasco. They had a Stronger City symposium in Gary. And they had the bus services from Illinois working. And they asked them about that, if they could give them some insight to the funding. The talk stopped right there when they asked them about it.

I asked Ty today all these comments that are being used today, I think we need to get together with the communities. And you have the elected officials when you have NIRPC meetings. If it takes lock the door and show them what's happened today so they can get this settled, because there's no reason they can't get their heads together and work this out.

I don't know if you can have a special meeting,

executive meeting. You have all the elected officials right there. They're on the Commissioners on the Board. Why not use them? There's none of them -- there's only a couple here today. But why not show them what happens here today and let them see what happens? Because they need to get together and work this out. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> TY WARNER: Thank you, Rudy. And just so everybody knows what's happening with all this next, at the next NIRPC Commission meeting, which is currently scheduled for December 11th, but watch our website just because you never know. But it's scheduled for December 11th. This transcript and all this will be given to the NIRPC Commissioners and forwarded to them and recapped of what was happening here today. So that's happening at the next NIRPC meeting.

>> STEVE WALSH: Who was next?

>> Hi, I think what this really comes down to is an issue of justice, because I live in Schererville. We've got two cars. I can go anywhere I want. But there are plenty of folks who don't have that. They just don't. And they're being denied things that we take for granted

because the powers that be, they don't have a voice with the powers that be. So that's why I'm here is to be, to learn how to be a voice for these folks. Because the stories you're hearing, that just shouldn't be. It's simply not right.

And, yeah, they're the elected officials and the Quality of Life Council and all that and that's all well and good. But when you see people who are just trying to get by from day-to-day, and they're not able to do that or else it's a struggle for them, then something's very wrong.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: I just wanted to ask. You have two cars. You live in Schererville. If there was a bus and it was a good bus service like they're talking about PACE, would you use it?

>> Yeah.

>> STEVE WALSH: Even with your two cars?

>> Absolutely. We use cars because we have to. But from a traffic standpoint, a congestion standpoint, and certainly from an ecological standpoint, absolutely. It's just that there aren't buses out there to go anywhere.

>> STEVE WALSH: Would your neighbors out there in the suburbs?

>> Probably not. I can't say entirely, but I think the majority of them probably wouldn't. And it's just because suburbs were built for cars. I mean, when you look at houses, what do you see first? You see the garage. And how many subdivisions don't even have sidewalks for people to walk on? So the suburbs were built for cars. So I think it would be a harder sell out there.

But do I think that should let us stop? No. Because that's where the opportunity is. People say, well, why don't they get a job? Why don't they go to school? It's always finger pointing. Well, because they simply don't have the ability to access all of those opportunities.

So I am all for a regional system that will allow people to do that because anything that affects anyone else affects me. We're all in this together, though unfortunately with the fragmentation and the politics of this area, not everybody sees it that way by a long shot. But we are all in this together. Absolutely.

>> STEVE WALSH: Thank you.

[Applause]

Who was next? Right back there, with the black shirt.

>> Good evening. I'm here mostly to thank the Township Trustee. I am so grateful for Dial-a-Ride that is supplemented with AAA. For me, it's wonderful. I have tried, and sometimes successfully, to get other people to use it. They have trouble because they don't plan ahead. And sometimes they can't plan ahead. And that is one concern we need to look at.

A second concern now that we're using some of the technical capabilities of Prompt service, when they call my home, I answer the phone and there is a long delay. I keep saying hello for quite a long time. And before I realize that I had to hang on, I thought it was somebody playing games and I hung up. So I didn't get their messages. And I'm sure people who are new to that service might have the same problem.

Now, I just keep waiting. But I couldn't get to doctor's appointments, shopping, to volunteer, even to the library without Dial-a-Ride. And I am so very grateful. Their staff tries so hard. And they are so kind. And so patient and so cooperative that I would love to publicly

thank every one of them.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: Actually, on the back of all those kudos, I'd actually like to ask you. You expanded greatly after the RBA, right?

>> FRANK MYRVAN: We received a grant of \$1.3 million that allowed us to expand for three years -- 2015 it will be a deadline or if we run out of the money first.

>> STEVE WALSH: What's the status?

>> FRANK MYRVAN: The money is going quickly because we're providing a great number of rides because the volume is increased.

So as I continually keep mentioning, in order to stretch that money, we have to bundle more riders on the buses to be able to bring our costs per ride down so that we can be more economical.

Actually, I sat down with Chip and I talked business for a second. We couldn't figure out a way how to reduce the amount of cancellations. So as your numbers go up, your cancellations go up. So you have to figure out a way to reduce your cancellations because that's money, basically, you're spending. People call for rides.

AAA shows up. No one comes out of the house. There's a fee for that. That's a ride for someone else who may need one down the road.

So what we're trying to do, and he actually led us down this path. Dial-a-Ride takes out the first wave of riders, and so we're bundling more on the buses, getting them to their destination. We know they're riders and then AAA brings them back. So that way we reduce our cancellations. Any dollars we waste on a cancellation is wasted money that we can never get back. So we have increased our numbers.

And to zero in on your question, the money is going quickly because the volume is there and it is a constant reverse ticking clock in my mind to try to figure out what's next? Where are we going to get the funding? Because I took it on apprehensively, knowing that it was a limited amount of money. And there are only few funding options: Local option income tax, a wheel tax or a beverage tax. That's from years of knowing what goes on. And there's no will for any of those.

One of our hopes is to be able to latch onto the South Shore expansion and to have Congressman Visclosky, the

RDA, NIRPC and the current providers be able to begin figuring out a system to expand it.

And Dial-a-Ride isn't exactly the absolute perfect answer. We must perfect it on our own end and find more economical ways to provide that transportation. We can't pick up one person and take them on a bus and take them back. Our volume doesn't allow us to do that now, anyway. But there's got to be an understanding on the rider's side that you may be picked up for a ride at 8:00 and your destination is at 9:30. And that's so we could loop around and five other streets and pick up five other people to take them there.

So the money is running out. There's a sense of urgency to find a system or something in place. That's my responsibility. And when I say I was apprehensive, because when we go back to 12,000 rides, and we're still getting 48,000 phone calls, people are only going to remember that the North Township Dial-a-Ride can't provide those rides anymore. They don't care where the funding came from. No one will ask me where did the money go? We're no longer providing the rides. So there are real people waiting in the balance of me making progress on

that or the Township making progress on that.

>> STEVE WALSH: What you're saying right now is you don't have a solution, at least right now, to replace that funding?

>> FRANK MYRVAN: Looking you straight in the eye, I do not have a solution. I've met with the Indiana Department of Transportation. I've met with Congressman Visclosky's office. I've met with the RDA. I've met with NIRPC. All I can tell you is it's a work in progress. And understand that I'm on the line and the Township's on the line.

Because once you -- the grant, by design, the grant is to elevate your service to provide proof that it works. So we have to do everything efficiently. We have to do everything on an economy of scale. We have to charge a fee. And then we have to go to the table and say this is what we've done. We've used private and public partnerships. We've used technology, the highest level technology that we can to do our dispatch. And we've done everything we can efficiently to provide these rides.

Now that we have proven that, we have to find funding somewhere. And it's only the local match, the 20%, that everyone's talking about. Then we have to go find Federal

funding. And NIRPC has to assist us on that.

And there's not only one, because I know this, there is not only one demand service. This is very localized because we are here in North Township. But there's South Lake that provides 49,000 rides. There's Portage, which was here earlier, that provides 10 to 12,000 rides. And there is Opportunity Enterprises that provides a lot more rides than we do.

So this is -- we're all in the same boat. It is providing a product, having a political and social will to have public transportation, and for everyone to get on board and say that the outcomes of the benefit far outweigh the naysayers.

>> STEVE WALSH: That gives you exactly what the status is right now of that service. It's proven to be very popular, especially at the RDA.

>> Hello again. I want to address the issue of Prompt. I think that was the best thing that could have happened, because before, you were limited for the time you could call to get a ride. Now it's 24/7. It's fantastic. Yes, there's a little bit of a wait when you do go on. But here's the plus side. When you find the information about

your ride, it's all recorded. You get to confirm it right then and there. So the system is really, really going well.

I would like to address PACE bus. PACE bus is running through Lansing. They have paratransit service. Just what the deal is I don't really know. It would have to be looked into.

And as far as dental, in our area here just a few months ago, we had Regional Mental Health open up right across from the library. They will help people with dental and even provide you with the transportation to come and go on their own bus.

And I want to speak a little bit about Gary because when Gary came in where I live, I have both the Gary buses on my route. It's fantastic going down Michigan. But when they brought that bus down to the East Chicago train station and brought it down Michigan, they took that route away from people like Miss Alice here who was using it because it went past the Hammond South Shore train station. So there needs to be a way that Gary can take in a little bigger route to service people because everybody from Michigan on is stranded. They're just stranded.

They have no way of getting around.

And another thing I'd like to say, I'd like to give an invite -- and first of all let me give a thank you to Lakeshore Public Media for coming out here. But I want to give you an invite that can help all of us greatly. Come on out. I'm sure many, many people who are walking these sidewalks and especially your elderly, your disabled, when it's payday, their checks come in. Come on out and talk to them about how comfortable it is. Ask them what they are going through. Let the word get out there how desperately we need fixed transportation in this area.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: Who's next?

>> SANDY O'BRIEN: Hello. I'm Sandy O'Brien from Hobart, Indiana and also from Sierra Club. And I've been going to NIRPC meetings forever, so I know that public transit needs a local match. And that is the big problem around here. We don't have the local match.

I also thank Lakeshore Public Radio for coming out, that's wonderful, Mr. Myrvan, for working as hard as he can to get public transit in North Township, and GPTC

for working as hard as they can to keep transit going in and out of Gary for their out-of-city run. And thanks for Ty Warner and Brian Snedecor, President of NIRPC board, for coming, because NIRPC really needs to know that we need bus transit. We need paratransit for disabled people that can't use a bus. But we need plain old bus transit for people that need to go to school, need to go to jobs.

I know a fair number of people that can't drive, either, because they have epilepsy or can't see well enough or have drunk driving convictions or whatever, you know. There's a lot of people that can't drive. There's an awful lot of people who are driving on suspended licenses, too. They get caught all the time. Go to court and find out how many there are.

And it's a matter of justice. And it's a matter of economic development for our whole region because all these people that are stranded and not able to go to work and get proper jobs and stuff like that and go to school, they're held back and they're not being productive citizens.

So it's a matter of justice, like the lady before me said. And we need to find a local match. And I am just

totally amazed that all the public officials and municipalities almost to a one, except maybe Hammond, they all lined up like sheep to the slaughter to send money for the commuter rail expansion when, really, that costs probably four times as much as regional bus transit would cost.

[Applause.]

And nobody pushed the figures out, but I think it's probably about four times as much. So we should be demanding regional bus transit before commuter rail expansion because commuter rail expansion is really a further vacuuming out of the northern commuter rail line.

It is just like St. Mary Medical Center when they first started working there. It was just a little satellite hospital. Gary Mercy Hospital was in Gary and that was the main hospital. But it didn't take long before Gary hospital was no more. And I think that's GPTC's greatest fear, too, that they join the regional bus system, pretty soon Gary wouldn't have any money anymore.

So there's regional issues of wealth and poverty or north and south or however you want to talk about it, but it's there. And we need to think about the good of all

the region because what happens in the north cities goes to the suburbs and it goes beyond. There's problems everywhere now. We can't just bury our heads in the sand. We need to fight for justice and economic development, and regional bus transit is part of it for everyone. Thank you.

[Applause.]

>> THERESA TORRES: I'm sorry that Dennis Rittenmeyer left, and I'm sorry because I wanted to say something in response to what his perception was about why the RBA failed. I think that the best thing we can do is learn from the RBA's failure.

Young lady over there was talking about the situation that many of her clients are in, the real life-or-death situation. And, Steve, when you asked her, what are those people doing? Unconsciously I said aloud, they're dying. And the reason -- because they are. And the connection between that thought and the RBA was: We found that the RBA failed to recognize the seriousness of the issues these people face.

Somebody here, I think Mr. Myrvan, was talking about Raymond Fletcher. There was an RBA Board meeting, and

Raymond Fletcher pointed out that people were dying waiting for resolution. A couple of the Board members thought that was funny.

There was a meeting similar to this a few years back, although the difference is you weren't facilitating it, so this is a much better meeting. But there was a meeting in which one RBA Board member throughout the whole meeting, there's a videotape on our website, was reading a paperback book while the people were talking.

So that lack of recognition of the importance of the people's issues, that lack of the recognition of the need to involve the public, not just give lip service to it, but make sure they know about these opportunities.

We have to learn that whoever goes forward, whether it's the BLT, the VLP, whatever it is, you've got to involve the people, not just say that you are.

And so I'm going to ask NIRPC, hey, we only have two elected officials here, and God bless both of you for being here all day. Can I ask you: Number one, can you commit to doing this at least annually? Can you talk about putting a survey up online? Use the people. Use public radio. Use the folks that are out there.

As you know, our strongest criticism was what we said was your lack of effort to truly engage the public, the people we think are the stakeholders. Everybody here belongs to an organization, gets services from an organization, some way. There's a whole network in Northwest Indiana. Let them help you get the people on board, because if you get the people on board, you'll get the money.

[Applause.]

So we're kind of a rough bunch up here in Northwest Indiana, rough edges. So don't assume because somebody isn't talking the way you want to hear them talk, that they can't be of value to you.

I'm going to ask you: Can you at least at your next meeting, can you talk to your elected officials, make sure they understand the level of importance, the passion you heard today, the potential resource that these people are to you? So use the network that's already in place. And let us help. Thanks.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: Who else? Anybody who hasn't spoken yet? I'm sorry. I keep turning around the wrong way.

>> STEPHANIE: My name is Stephanie. I live in North Hammond. Like this lady said, we have to walk almost two miles to get to the Gary bus at Strack and Van Til's. And that's kind of hard, especially when myself, I just had the back surgery in June. And I'm not supposed to do a lot of walking because of the surgery. And they told me it will take six months to a year before my back will completely heal.

And my other concern is we have children. And there's one school out of the City of Hammond that does not provide bus transportation, and that is Hammond High School, due to the violence and the way the children act and the way the staff is and the school city transportation. These children are walking to school at 6:00 in the morning to make it to school before they get into a lockout at 7:20. They walk 2.5 miles because they will not provide bus service.

And these children, they counted on the Hammond transit or the regional transit to get back and forth to school every day, and now they don't have that. So when we have bitter temperatures and the City of Hammond doesn't call off school, these kids are walking in below-zero weather.

And that's another reason we need our buses back.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: The woman here said it was 1.5 miles. You're saying it's 2.5 miles?

>> STEPHANIE: It's 1.5. Sorry about that. But, still, 6:00 in the morning, anything can happen. Exactly.

>> ASHLEY: Hi, my name Ashley and she's exactly right. I live in North Hammond. As a matter of fact, we all live on the same block. Both my daughter and her two boys, they do go to Hammond High. And my daughter wakes up at 5 o'clock in the morning every morning just so that she's ready and out the door. They walk over two bridges, a set of railroad tracks. It's not the greatest of neighborhoods that they got to walk through, you know what I'm saying?

It's not a matter of -- you know, you got the winter seasons coming up. It's going to be below zero. You're going to have knee deep snow. And she's right. What parent wants to send their child out in that type of weather to walk that far? You're walking up these bridges. It takes a lot to walk over these big bridges. Can you imagine if there's ice on there, the snow? Oh,

that's a hazard. We have to worry about our children and it being a hazard going over those bridges, going over those railroad tracks with those conditions, okay. You've got pouring down storming rain.

My daughter went to school one day. By the time she got to school, she was soaking wet. Her shoes were even squishing. She calls home and says, "Mom, I'm completely soaked." What choice did I have to do but to tell her because I don't have transportation for her, "Sarah, come home. You can't be in school like that." They're going to get sick. They could have worse.

The other thing is, I agree with these ladies. It's a hard situation getting to and from doctor's appointments when you've got your elderly, you're disabled. You got children that have mental disabilities. The schooling, getting to stores, transportation for that is bad.

Job opportunities. I have a very big struggle with job opportunities because I have limited transportation to jobs that I can get to. If I'm not even walking condition, walking distance to a job that I can apply for, if I can't get to some type of transportation that will get me to a job, guess what? I'm stuck with no job. And

it's not fair.

And I don't want to be disrespectful and put anybody down in a situation, but to me, it feels like instead of everyone helping us, trying to get the bus transportation to help the ones that are in need that don't have the money or the means that some people do, and this is going to sound harsh and I'm not trying to, but to me it sounds like the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and we're being thrown under the bus.

[Applause.]

Being thrown under the bus. And I'm all for -- and I support all the people who have money, who have good jobs, who have good homes and good lives and have transportation. That's great. It's wonderful. But the ones that don't have that type of situation? It's a struggle. And all we're asking is just for a little bit of help. That's it.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: You said that all three of you are on the same block. What made you all decide to come down here today?

>> STEPHANIE: For me personally, I recently fractured

my ribs. So I need transportation because I don't like to keep calling the Dial-a-Ride because I feel like the elderly need it a little bit more. And I know money is stretched. If we had a bus transportation system, I wouldn't have to worry about it.

It's odd to me -- and I keep hearing people stressing about the Gary Public Transportation. Gary shouldn't have to take on a whole other city. Hammond is its own city. It shouldn't have to do that. We had a busing system. You stopped it.

Then I keep hearing people say about finding money. It's odd to me East Chicago has a bus system, and it's free to ride their bus. You pay nothing. And they have three different buses. But you took our busing system and you tell us we ought to get jobs.

The cost of living is steadily going up in the City of Hammond, but you give us no type of alternatives in order to survive. What are you giving us?

[Applause.]

>> I just have a real specific question about a little thing because these stories about the kids, kids who are in school, trying to stay in school and what they have to

go through, it's breaking my heart, and it's scaring me on their behalf. So God bless all of you.

But I'm just wondering -- and this really is a question. I could well be wrong and I need to know that. But I think schools get Federal funding or state funding, maybe not in Indiana, I'm not as familiar as with Illinois. But I think some of it is based on attendance. So in this bad weather, you probably do have to keep the kids home sometimes. So attendance is down. So their numbers are down.

So I'm wondering if one small piece, maybe it's not part of public transit, but school transit, which is different, but I wonder if they need to be approached and talked about the cost of providing bus transit versus how much they lose from the reduced attendance? That was just the only thing, because this is killing me.

>> STEVE WALSH: We got the answer.

>> I will answer that because I called the Hammond school transportation and it was told to me -- because I was wondering why Clark had so many school buses and Hammond High only has one school bus.

>> What is Clark?

>> Clark is another Hammond high school. But it's in Whiting.

>> Clark is a middle/high school, but it's considered a Hammond public school, but it has a Whiting address.

>> It's in Hammond.

>> It was told to me that the funding that's coming from a different place for Clark Middle School and High School as opposed to where funding is coming for Hammond High School.

And then it was told to me that the funding was cut short for Hammond High School because they were taking on other projects.

So when I started inquiring about these other projects, that's when everything started getting short. Nobody had answers. I had to go to this office and talk to this person or go and talk to this person.

So me being the person that I was, I told the school board transportation that when the weather is bad and my son's missed as many days as they miss, do not send the police or the truancy to my house because you put me in this position. It should be way more buses for these kids.

[Applause.]

>> I have to say that I agree with her on the whole bus situation because when we did call the School City of Transportation, they told us it wasn't their problem. And it's not just Hammond High. It's Eggers Middle School, they does not have transportation. My son has transportation because he has special need.

Some say it's not fair. You live in North Hammond, and he goes all the way to a South Hammond School. But the only reason he has the transportation is because he's in a special needs class and that's Federal funding.

My thing about Hammond High is they say they don't have the money for transportation, but just recently they bought every single student in that school Google Mac [sic] computers. Now, that funding for those computers could have went on transportation instead of these kids walking in bitter weather.

>> I'm going to add to this because she's absolutely correct, okay. My daughter just doesn't only go to Hammond High. She goes to the Hammond Area Career Center, as well. She goes to Hammond High for her first part of her day; and then after her first part of the day there,

her second part of the day she walks from Hammond High to the Area Career Center and she does her medical terminology and her physiology class there, as well.

So, I mean, I agree with Miss Robertson. You've got kids that are doing extremely well. They're struggling on a daily basis to try to get good grades and have perfect attendance and make something of themselves. And it just seems like when you try to talk to the proper authority to try to get the help, you talk to the schools, "not our problem." You talk to the bus transit, "not our problem." You try to talk to your school officials, "not our problem."

Okay. Well, whose problem is it? Whose problem is it going to be when these children who are doing so well and have 3.5 and 4.0 grade averages and AB honor roll students can't get to school because they don't have transportation and their grades start failing and their perfect attendance starts failing? Who's going to be there for them?

And she's right. It's going to be they're going to look at us parents as you're not making your child go to school. Then you got to go to court and you're facing

fines and you're facing jail time and truancy. Why? Because we can't afford it. We can't afford to get our children where they need to be and we don't have the help to do it.

She also brought up another good point. Hammond High is not the only one. Eggers is, too. Next year my son will be going to Eggers. He is sixth grade. He will have to walk with his sister to go to school. He has a mental disability. He doesn't have the type of class and stuff as her son does where he's able to get the bus transportation. But he does have a mental disability to where it kind of scares me for him to be walking a 1.5-mile distance. Is it safe for him to do that? When you're taking ADHD and bipolar medication, to me, that's not a safe thing to do.

So, I mean, there's so many things that we could sit here and we can discuss and we can tell you sad stories and everything else, but the moral of the story is she's completely right. We need a voice. We need somebody or everyone that can pull together and help us get a voice. Because if we can't voice our opinions and say what we need and have somebody help us get what we need, we're not

going to go anywhere. It's going to stay the same. And we might as well just shut down and not say nothing.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: We are at the turn in here. We're into the last half hour. And you think about health care, you think about jobs, you never really think about education.

Who else hasn't spoken yet? Come on. You came all the way out here. It's not that cold.

>> LINDA: Hello. I'm Linda. I don't usually tell people where I work because I work at the Division of Family Resources, A/K/A Welfare. Everybody hates me. But, anyway, I just wanted to mention about like you, the clients that we serve, they can't even get to downtown Hammond to our office because there are no buses. I have people walking. I have people riding their bikes. It's just insane.

But one of the things that's caused me to come here tonight is that a lot of the food stamp, it's called Snap now. A lot of their rules are starting to change again.

And the Federal Government instituted a thing a few years back that Indiana has had a waiver from and specifically our area because we don't have

transportation. We have not required people that are able-bodied to work and don't have dependent children, most of them have to work 20 hours a week.

Indiana's getting ready to make us start doing that again. They said November. It's not happening. We don't know when it's going to happen. But it's going to be soon. And they're going to have that anybody who doesn't have children that's between, I think, 18 and 49 years old will have to be working 20 hours a week or else they won't get Snap benefits for three months in a 36-month period.

That means a lot of folks are going to lose their benefits because they can't get to a job. They can't keep the job because they can't keep going to the job. And it's one of the things that's been laying on my mind, is a lot of the clients really do want to work. Some of them really want to work, but they can't get to the job. If they get a job, they can't keep the job because the car breaks down, nobody's there to help them out. And people, when you call off work now, you don't get a second chance. They say "don't even come in tomorrow," a lot of these businesses.

So I just wanted to let the regional agency know that

this is another thing to keep in mind as you're considering what to do with the regional transportation, because we're going to have a lot more people that are going to be in a desperate need of transportation just because of the snap rules changing and things going like that.

And then also with the TANF, people are supposed to be working. We have impact in our office that tries to help folks; but if they can't get to the job, we can give them the little tokens for the bus, but if there's no bus for those tokens, they will not be able to get that job and keep that job.

So that's what I wanted to tell you, thank you.

>> STEVE WALSH: How many of your clients, they're just not working because they can't get to a job?

>> LINDA: We don't have caseloads anymore, so I don't have a specific group of people that I work with all the time. But probably about 20% of them are wanting to work but they can't keep a job because they don't have a car or they don't have reliable transportation. They don't have family members who can get them in to work. If they find a job near their house, that's great. But that's not

always going to happen.

>> STEVE WALSH: A lot of people talk about food -- when you don't have a grocery -- but work --

>> Work deserts. I like that. We can get them the food. And I'm worrying about the folks that will not get the benefits, where are they going to turn? North Township Trustee? Because we can't give them Snap anymore for three years. And the food pantries are going to get overwhelmed again. It will be a skyrocketing problem.

South Bend's getting ready to start this in January, I believe. So we're looking. And South Bend has a really good transportation system. So we're looking to see how it will go over over there. I don't know when Lake County is going to be pulled into that mess with these able-bodied people.

>> STEVE WALSH: Stay tuned.

[Applause.]

All right. Who hasn't gotten a chance, among these folks that have all come out on this weekday evening, who hasn't gotten a chance to speak? Here we go. A transit provider.

>> FRANK ROSADO: I've got three minutes.

[Laughter]

I got a bus the catch, I'm sorry.

[Laughter]

My name is Frank Rosado. I'm the Director of Transit for the City of East Chicago. And I've been back in transit this is my third go-around in transit for the City of East Chicago. Since I've been back, Theresa's group, Everybody Counts, Gary, East Chicago, North Township Trustee's office, we meet monthly to discuss issues of transit and our riders.

A month ago earlier this month, we met and we were trying to figure out how we can get the powers that be, the legislators and stuff like that the information that we care about public transportation in Northwest Indiana. I came up with a really simple idea of putting a petition online. So I put it up about halfway through the month, and I've got about 100 people that have signed up for it. I've had about 800 people that have viewed it. I don't know if that's good or bad.

But let me tell you that if you want to sign this petition, you can go to Gary Public Transportation, its website, East Chicago, City of East Chicago,

EastChicago.com. Go to the bus transit site, and there will be information on how you can go there. Also on Theresa's organization's website.

Maybe that's a way for some of our legislators or the powers that be, that's a way they'll find out what they need to let them know.

And also to the gentleman that mentioned the East Chicago buses not having bike racks, they'll have bike racks by next year.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: Solved that problem. So who else do we have here who hasn't had a chance to speak yet? I know there are folks here who want to take a second crack here and we've got a little time for that yet. But who hasn't had a chance? Every time I turn around. Ma'am, did you want to speak?

>> ALLEN HAMMOND: Let me get the mic. We want to get you.

>> CAROL: My name is Carol from North Hammond. I became disabled back in 2007 from a tragic car accident. But my question is: When we did have the bus service, where was our money going that we were sticking in the

change thing? That's what I want to know.

>> STEVE WALSH: You mean the RBA, the Hammond bus service?

>> CAROL: Basically when the services were going through and everybody was getting on the buses and they were paying what they were supposed to pay to get on the buses, where was all that money going if there's no money for the buses?

>> STEVE WALSH: The service wasn't free. People were paying their fares. How does that work? Bel?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: So the question is it was helping support that system. The Fed, they had the Federal money, and that requires a match. So the fares were part of the match that supported the Hammond bus system as long as it operated.

>> STEVE WALSH: How much of the total cost of providing transportation, how much of that is fare box?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: Statewide in our area, less than 30%. Buses are highly subsidized, just like the highways are. What you drive your car on is just as subsidized as public transit.

Yeah, remember the pie charts we were showing earlier?

There's no one source of money that pays 100% for public transit. So you need multiple sources. And when somebody goes out of business, then the fees aren't collected anymore, and so the local match disappears. And that's what happened with the RBA. The local match disappeared.

>> CAROL: So basically what you're saying is all the people that were riding these public transit and that money that they were paying was going in to help fund the transportation. And if one side didn't match, well, if you've got all the people that are actually paying their money to ride these bus transportations and the transit, then obviously that would say the people aren't the ones that are lacking the money or the funding, who's lacking the funding?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: I don't remember what the RBA cost was. Let me see if I can give you an example.

Well, if it takes \$180,000 to run a system and you're pulling in maybe \$3,000 in fares and then you get 50% of the rest of the cost is a Federal grant and maybe 10% is a state, you still have that local money you have to keep raising every year. You need it to come in every year.

When the Regional Development Authority, the RDA, they

only committed to funding the Regional Bus Authority. They only committed two years of operating money. That was what created that system. And that's what made it go. They were getting funding also from the City of Hammond at that time. The Mayor made that commitment.

But the object was to come up with a permanent funding source before that money ran out. What was going to replace what came out of the development authority, but there was never the political agreement or the popular will, frankly, to save it, to come up with and give, whether it's property tax-based or whether it was going to be some other source of funding.

Dennis mentioned he'd been working on this for over 10 years. We went to the County Council a long time ago to ask about hotel/motel tax being dedicated to fund a Lake County regional transit system. And the hotel/motel people and the tourism bureau people said no, that's not a good source. It's not appropriate. And so we got nowhere with that. And nobody's had a better idea since then.

>> STEVE WALSH: So basically how much does a ride on the RBA cost?

>> \$1.25, for adult. 60 cents for handicapped.

>> STEVE WALSH: I think what she's saying is it costs \$10 to ride. The rest of the money was coming from somewhere else.

Hang on. We got another question.

>> CAROL: I understand what you're saying about the state funds to the fare box. My question is, well, the fares that they have in Whiting, the ones they do at Harrison Park and all these other events that they do, is that not state money? Is that not county money? Does that not count toward the buses?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: You mean the --

>> CAROL: Any of the events that they do in Hammond, none of it counts?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: No.

>> CAROL: What are they doing with it, then?

>> They're using it for different things.

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: I don't want to misunderstand and make trouble for Hammond that I don't need to.

>> STEVE WALSH: You're saying the other thing that the city provides, those services?

>> CAROL: What I'm asking is the money that they pay like the concerts that they have down there at the

grounds, the little events that they have, like you see Mayor McDermott at all these events; and what I want to know is none of that money is contributing or can be contributed toward the busing company? Toward the busing system, or toward North Township or any other helping program?

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: We want to -- I want to say that a dedicated source of revenue means that it's raised every year and it goes exclusively to public transit. It's like street maintenance. Every year you want the streets plowed. So every year the city budgets X amount of dollars, and that pays the street plowing.

If it comes from a variety of sources, whether it's, you know, profit from Wolf Lake Summer Fest or whether it's all property tax-based, the city budgeting process dedicates those funds to all these things that are provided by the city. It's just at the moment that doesn't include any public transit.

>> STEVE WALSH: I think the answer is yes. The city makes choices as every city does. Pick up the garbage.

>> BELINDA PETROSKEY: Public policy setting is done in cities and towns and counties all the time. And the

budget process tells you what the city's priorities are, what they're spending money on, what they want to spend, what they can spend money on, whether it includes transit or not, that's part of the public policy decisionmaking.

>> STEVE WALSH: We've got Theresa's hand up.

>> THERESA TORRES: This is specific to the situation in Hammond. I think that when we talk about the city's priority, there's the city, and there's the city, the elected officials. Many of us were there. What happened was very simple. The Mayor of Hammond, who I don't like to talk about people behind their backs, but he ought to be here. It's not my fault.

[Applause.]

But the Mayor said directly to every one of your Councilmen: If you vote and put one penny towards public transportation, I will veto the budget. So that doesn't mean that even the elected officials of Hammond were not in support of the transit system. That's what happened.

I wish Gary was here, Gary Public Transit, to give you a specific number, but I can tell you that they already developed a plan a long time ago on how much money it would take to add routes in North Township. I don't

remember the number, but it was incredibly low. So the only way it's going to happen is if you get the City of Hammond to provide some assistance.

So take your concerns to your elected officials, to your Councilmen, go to the meetings. Go to the Mayor because, again, the services are sitting right there for you in North Township. Your kids don't have to be walking through the snow.

But it's going to take -- I don't remember the figure, but it's incredibly low. They provided the service that they started in Hammond. It would just take that much to add it in North Township -- I mean in North Hammond. But they're not going to be able to do it unless somebody in the City of Hammond said that's as important as having the rock bands come out to the park. That's going to take that. It's going to take you guys telling them that.

>> How, when they're not listening?

>> THERESA TORRES: How? Pick up a phone, write letters. Go to the meetings. Don't worry about being labeled troublemakers. I want to speak about her comment about the visitors' folks didn't want to support the tax. It wasn't just the folks at South Shore Visitors

Convention Center that did not support that tax going to the RBA, there was a whole lot of other folks, our agency included. So I don't want to see aspersions cast on one group. There was a lot of people thought that wasn't a good idea, and they made it clear. We're not saying that a regional transit system isn't a good idea; this particular mechanism isn't.

I think you have the support. You have the evidence that the support is there. The question is going to be: What do you do to give that information to the people that can make it happen? That's the real question of the day.

>> STEVE WALSH: We are coming down to the home stretch here. We have time for really only one or two more comments. Love to give it to anybody who hasn't had a chance or maybe only on their second turn at this point?

The fellow that runs the taxicabs? Let's try.

>> I have a feel for what the costs are. There's a publication in the State of Indiana puts out and the national government also puts out it talks about the costs of transit. The cost running a bus per rider in Hammond, East Chicago and Gary is about \$10 a rider. What that means is you pay \$1 for a fare, you're paying about 10% of

the cost. In Chicago, because they're more efficient, and PACE, because they're more efficient, they cost about \$5 per rider because they have more riders per bus. They pay \$2.50 a rider, which means their local match is not provided by taxes but by the riders who get on the bus. T

The same thing with the South Shore. South Shore costs \$10, you pay \$5 at each calling. Your local match is provided by the fare that comes out there.

The other thing -- this I am not sure of, but I think I read somewhere where the Affordable Care Act says that insurance companies are supposed to provide transportation for people trying to get to a doctor's office. I've been looking for this for months, but that thing is so big I can't find it in there. But I think it's in there because I was briefed on it one time on what the Affordable Care Act is supposed to cover. You may want to call the insurance company and say, "Will you provide transportation? Will you provide repayment for transportation if I give you a receipt?" So in other words, you don't have to depend on a bus, you can call a taxi company and they may charge you \$30 to or \$50 to go from Hammond to Crown Point and the insurance company

should reimburse that money.

The last thing I wanted to say is I carry a couple of people that have -- that should be eligible for paratransit. And they allow bus companies to take 21 days to answer whether they can be available for that. That 21 days means they're not working for 21 days. That's 21 days they're not contributing to the economy because they're at home because they can't get a ride. Or they're paying money to me and literally they're paying whatever they're making to the taxi company. That's not how it should be. I don't want buses here so that, I don't want to say it, I'm not going to make money off buses. But what it allows is people that don't have a lot of money that really should never be taking taxis, to take taxis 20 days and call me once a month to go to the grocery store. That's why I support public transit.

>> STEVE WALSH: Rudy, you might be the last word on this.

>> RUDY VELASCO: Well, I'll make it real quick. First, I want to thank the young lady who provided captions for -- I believe for the news show for volunteering for that. I'd like to thank her.

[Applause.]

And another important thing, I hope that NIRPC, the list that all the people that signed up today that they are included on your stakeholders' list because everybody here today all day made that effort to speak up. And I applaud every one of you for that. Give yourselves a nice applause, because you did a heck of a job. And that's the only way these barriers are going to be broken, because this is an industrial region. 20% of the people in here are disabled. So thank you very much.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: One more quick statement over here.

>> I just wanted to say one quick thing. I wanted to thank North Township for bringing all the people out of North Hammond here tonight to voice their opinion on this meeting and the regional bus system. Thank you, North Township.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: Got one more.

>> Does anyone know if the -- is going to be extended north?

>> STEVE WALSH: Your question is whether or not Gary

Public Transportation will be extended to North Hammond?

That seems to be a question. Three people.

>> Ray: I can answer that question.

>> STEVE WALSH: Take a shot.

>> Ray: I can answer that personally. We met with Everybody Counts. I met with the Mayor of Whiting, and Gary Transit is now talking to Whiting. So it's a possibility.

And one of the most important things all these transit services are doing is stopping at the colleges because that's a way we can really improve our area is through education. But, yes, there is something down the line possibly going to Whiting.

[Applause.]

>> STEVE WALSH: I think that's where we're going to end it here. I've been here since 1:00. Many of us have been here since 1:00. It's been an experience. I have really enjoyed this conversation. So many people so passionate about this issue. It makes you wonder why more hasn't been done sooner, honestly.

I want to thank our host. I want to thank NIRPC and Ty Warner for having me as well as Theresa Torres for

having me be the monitor -- moderator here. I'm losing my voice, sorry. This was a great experience. I'm glad I got the chance to do it.

If you want to hear the show that was done at 4:00, that's going to be on Lakeshore Public Radio tomorrow at 1:00 during my normal time. In the meantime, just thanks, everybody, for coming out.

[Applause.]

[End of Pubic Hearing.]

PUBLIC TESTIMONY RECEIVED IN WRITING

(VIA EMAIL)

Dear Jerry,

Though it's been great to have the Dial-A-Ride Program available, it' become more important to have a permanent bus system in place as funding for the Dial-A-Ride will be ending next year.

Mayor McDermott made a huge mistake taking away the funding from the city from our public transportation. I cannot understand a city of 100,000 people has no public system in place for it's residence.

Hammond city government continues to waste city dollars on frivolous projects that do not serve the people. I am very frustrated and annoyed as to how they can do that with our city dollars. The residents deserve better.

Many residents need a more permanent system in place, and they need it now. The expansion of the Dial A Ride is proof of that fact. I have written the Mayor on this and it's always ignored.

A clearer message is needed.

I thank the Township for its continued support of our community and hope it will continue as so many people now rely on your services.

My only hope is the Mayor will come around and bring back our buses as we are in great need them. They also need to run seven days a week and longer hours.

They need to run to all the towns linked in the township and perhaps even a little further. Or link up to systems that are already in place. BTW, I voted for Frank again this year and hope he remains with our township for a very long time.

Bring Back our buses Mr. Mayor!

Thanks,

Robin Goldman
Resident and Dial A Ride Patron.

