

Chapter IV : **Human & Economic Resources**



RailCats fans. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

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Overview

Beginning in 2003, NIRPC engaged in economic development planning and implementation as one of its key functions serving the region. This came in recognition of the unique role the agency holds with respect to interagency coordination and program development on a regional scale.

While NIRPC serves as the region's public sector entity for economic development, private sector economic interests are represented by the Northwest Indiana Forum (the "Forum"). In August of 2009, a public/private partnership and compact was made between NIRPC and the Forum defining each entity's prospective role and agreeing to support the establishment of an independent Economic Development District for Northwest Indiana. As part of that compact, both entities also endorsed the development of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS serves as the foundation by which the economic development district may seek funding from the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA). This includes grant assistance and other financial support for Economic Development projects, programs and activities in Northwest Indiana. Thus the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District (NWIEDD), drawn from NIRPC, functions as an independent body that includes representation from elected officials, private industry, workforce development agencies, universities, utilities and economic development interests. Nine public sector representatives were appointed by NIRPC and eight private sector representatives by the Forum.

Along with the formation of the NWIEDD, NIRPC also provides technical services support to the Forum and partners on select initiatives. This includes planning and programming of infrastructure to support economic development activities and providing assistance and support to the NWIEDD.

Successful regional economic development requires collaboration and partnerships among public, private and nonprofit entities. Each entity plays an important role in the creation of a successful partnership. NIRPC must sustain this network of partnerships with and between local elected officials, local economic development officials, federal and state agencies and entities serving multiple markets. NIRPC must also continue to partner and work with the Forum and Indiana Economic Development Corp. (IEDC) which is the state's lead economic development agency.

In order to sustain existing and create new economic opportunities for the region, NIRPC must continue to support policies of growth and development, support sustainable environmental policies, provide infrastructure policies, resources and funding, and most of all, coordinate, partner with and support local, regional and state organizations.

Along with the Forum and the IEDC, the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB) is a work force entity to be recognized. NIRPC will continue to support its efforts. The NWIWB mobilizes and integrates the leadership, services, and resources of the community to support the creation of a work force that is highly skilled, motivated and diverse. Appointed by local elected officials, NWIWB is charged with overseeing the seven county workforce system, including Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties. The NWIWB is supported by the Center of Workforce Innovations (CWI), which serves under contract as staff support for the board and Regional Operator and Fiscal Agent for the Region's one stop career center system. Together, NWIWB and CWI connect private sector leaders with policy makers from government, education, economic development, labor, and community-based organizations to analyze regional labor market trends, needs, and issues, in order to develop strategic work force solutions for the system in Northwest Indiana.

The Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) is another partner. The RDA was enabled by the Indiana General Assembly in 2005 for the purpose of expanding the Gary/Chicago International Airport, extending the South Shore Rail Service, redeveloping the Lake Michigan shoreline, and creating a regionalized bus transit system. It can pursue other qualified projects of regional significance if warranted. The RDA receives \$27.5 million annually, \$10 million from the State of Indiana and \$17.5 million from local units of government in Lake and Porter counties.

In order to sustain existing and create new economic opportunities for the region, NIRPC must continue to support policies of growth and development, support sustainable environmental policies, provide infrastructure policies, resources and funding, and most of all, coordinate, partner with and support local, regional and state organizations. The partnership between NIRPC and the Forum is vitally important. The following are key recommendations and strategies to realize the region's economic objectives.

- Work with the region's stakeholders, continue to seek state and federal funding and create programs to support job and economic growth
- Work with regional partners and support implementation of regional development priorities
- Enhance economic competitiveness through the coordination of business, labor and education
 - Support strategies for reinvestment, retention and attraction of jobs and businesses for the Core Communities
 - Support existing plans, projects and initiatives
 - Promote coordination between education (universities), workforce development and economic development leaders
 - Promote innovation in emerging technologies and industries
 - Support new investments
 - Support agri-business and foster planning for local food systems



Downtown Valparaiso. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

Human & Economic Resources Goals & Objectives

The 2040 CRP Vision Statement addresses human and economic resources in its Vibrant Region vision theme: Our economy is thriving and our people are well-educated. Two goals and their related objectives provide the framework for further action and initiatives to bring about achieving this vision theme.

Goal: A globally competitive, diversified economy that protects & enhances our natural environment

Objectives:

- Maximize technology, productivity and efficiency of existing core industries
- Create diverse, emerging and sustainable industries
- Strengthen public/private partnerships resulting in increased regional investment
- Redevelop urban core areas
- Use/expansion of transportation and other infrastructure advantages
- Promote growth that protects and enhances the environmental assets of Northwest Indiana
- Improve the region's workforce to accommodate growth in emerging industries
- Improve overall quality of life to attract businesses and residents

Achieving these goals will require the active buy-in and support of not only NIRPC and other organizations and elected officials, but also involved residents.

Goal: Expanded access to knowledge & educational opportunities

Objectives:

- Develop a transportation system that provides safe and reliable access to educational facilities
- Maintain strategic partnerships with educational institutions
- Provide critical information to the public to enable meaningful public participation
- Educate leaders about best practices in urban and regional planning and public policy
- Improve infrastructure connectivity and access to the technology that supports distance education

Achieving these goals will require the active buy-in and support of not only NIRPC and other organizations and elected officials, but also involved residents. As with other initiatives, ongoing challenges related to the level of funding available to expand the capacities of NIRPC and partner organizations are very real. NIRPC and its partners will need to be creative and resourceful in identifying opportunities to coordinate efforts and seek alternative funding sources to support economic and workforce development, improved educational opportunities and enhancements to the regional business environment and quality of life.

The sections below outline current economic and business conditions and introduce recommended strategies to make more effective use of existing resources and pursue new initiatives. These initiatives will require the commitment of both NIRPC and its many partner organizations and member governments.

Current Conditions & Needs

Understanding the economic “base” of Northwest Indiana helps determine the region’s economic strengths and weaknesses and what opportunities exist for economic expansion in the future. A goal from the Quality of Life Council’s Indicators seeks the region to be a “Thriving Community; We aspire to be a Thriving Community that achieves economic well-being through dynamic job and business creation which can provide ample opportunities for productive employment and a high standard of living for all citizens.” (Quality of Life Indicators Report, 2008) A fundamental measure of the strength of the local economy is the amount of new employment opportunities to be created.

Northwest Indiana’s economic history is rooted in manufacturing. As NIR-PC’s partner, the Forum states, “Global companies like ArcelorMittal, the number one steel producer in the world, BP, one of the world’s largest energy companies, United States Steel Corporation, a leader in steel manufacturing, process and product technology, have found world class locations in Northwest Indiana.” Manufacturing continues to be the leading sector in our regional economy in terms of jobs. Due to structural changes in the global marketplace and productivity improvements in the steel industry, manufacturing over time has seen a loss in jobs. The largest sectors of employment in the region revolve around manufacturing, government, health care, retail tourism and hospitality. It is also important to note that casino operations are one of the largest employers outside of health care. Of these sectors, manufacturing and government have seen a reduction in jobs, while retail and health care jobs have increased. In recent years, the region has seen a significant increase in employment opportunities. The fastest-growing jobs are management positions, educational services, health care and social services, and transportation and warehousing opportunities.

Economic Clusters

Evaluation of the region’s economic clusters offers a window through which the region can identify and foresee its strongest growth opportunities for the future. This analysis uncovers the degree to which industry specialization

has formed the region around clusters of similar and related activities that in combination offer a competitive advantage in the marketplace. The top existing clusters in Northwest Indiana include steel, such as primary metal manufacturing; oil refining; gaming and amusements; and tourism. A number of potential clusters have emerged and could be further developed for future economic prosperity. These potential clusters include:

- **Transportation, distribution and logistics** – A broad industry sector responsible for managing the flow of goods, information and people between a point of origin and a point of consumption in order to meet the requirements of consumers. This movement of materials depends on the subsectors of road, rail, water and air. Businesses and companies depend on transportation, distribution and logistics to survive.
- **Advanced manufacturing** – The process of mass producing products on demand using the latest technology to maintain efficiency. Advanced manufacturing relies on manufacturing principles/processes and the ability to adapt to new technologies and methods.
- **IT/technology** – The processing, storage and distribution of data information
- **Professional and Medical services** – Health care facilities, medical offices, corporate headquarters, office complexes, etc.

Given the region’s location and recent changes in the business tax structure in Indiana (such as the personal property tax, local government property taxes and competitive corporate and personal income taxes), much attention has turned to the potential of logistics industries. IT tax exemptions which are a reduction in corporate business tax and property tax cap in the state constitution still exist. While the number of jobs in this transportation/warehousing sector is in-

creasing, the average wage associated with these jobs is lower than in manufacturing.

NIRPC can help advance the region's emerging sectors and clusters by continuing to work with the Forum and the IEDC and provide infrastructure support elements related to economic development.

Economic Trends

Historically, much of the economy of Northwest Indiana was built on the steel industry. The city of Gary was incorporated in 1906 when U. S. Steel chose that location as the site of its new plant. The location along the south shore of Lake Michigan proved very strategic, as it provided relatively easy access to ore deposits in Minnesota, as well as immediate access to domestic rail lines and international shipping opportunities via the St. Lawrence Seaway. For much of the past century, Northwest Indiana led the nation in steel production. However, in 1996, Indiana was surpassed by Ohio. Employment in the steel industry reached 66,400 in 1979 and has decreased to 18,000 in recent years. In the late '60s, steel mills accounted for 30% of direct employment in Northwest Indiana and by 2002, that figure was down to 8%. Over the past decade, several mills in Northwest Indiana have merged. ArcelorMittal and USS now own the five steel mills in Northwest Indiana. These corporate restructurings eliminated even more jobs. This job attrition reduces tax revenue, personal spending, increases family stress and shifts the burden for healthcare, pension and environmental cleanup to other sources.

Household income is an important measure of the vitality of the region's economy. Median household income is the measure of the income available per family and can be measured spatially to determine whether economic gains are reaching all segments of the population. Median household income for all three counties in the region exceeds the median household income for the state. However, signifi-

cant differences exist among the three counties that comprise the region. (QOL Indicators Report, 2008)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau and as shown in Table IV.1, 14.2% of Northwest Indiana residents were below the poverty level during 2006-2008, slightly higher than the Indiana and U.S. levels of 13.1% and 13.2%.

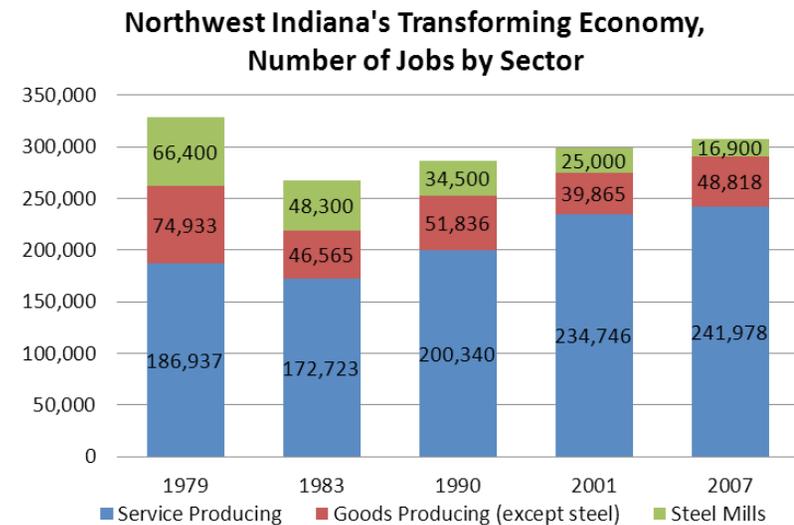


Figure IV.1 Number of Jobs by Sector

	Lake County	Porter County	LaPorte County	Northwest Indiana	Indiana	US
% Persons Below Poverty 2006-2008 Period	16.5	8.7	11.5	14.2	13.1	13.2
Persons Below Poverty 2006-2008 Period	80,425	13,797	11,955	106,177	778,370	38,573,393

Source: U. S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey 2006-2008.

Table IV.1 Persons below Poverty

respectively. At 16.5%, Lake County had the highest number of people below poverty level. LaPorte at 11.5% and Porter at 8.7% fell below the state and national levels.

The Forum has taken steps and continues to work on the performance of economic sectors. The Forum continues to work toward the identification and promotion of sustainable regional economic development opportunities and support the creation and retention of quality jobs. The Forum will continue to track leads by industry cluster.

Northwest Indiana competes in the Midwest and the nation to attract businesses, industries and economic development opportunities, bringing good quality jobs to the region. Industries and businesses consider a wide range of factors for choosing a location such as infrastructure, labor force, overall business environment, education, amenities and quality of life. Northwest Indiana is a market composed of global, national and regional businesses. People and businesses prosper and grow within this region of commerce, environmental beauty and transportation. Northwest Indiana offers a wide range

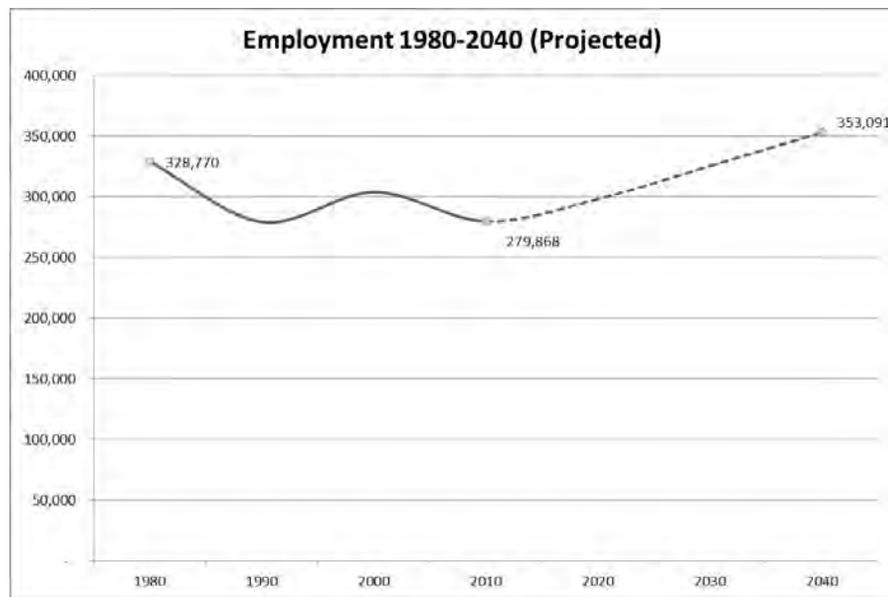


Figure IV.2 Projected Employment

of advantages that makes this region attractive, including low-cost, high-quality living, low energy costs, labor force and overall tax base. The Forum, the IEDC and the NWIEDD are catalysts for promoting economic development opportunities for the region. According to the Forum's 2010 Strategic Plan report, the organization will serve as the premier resource for economic development skills in:

- Expertise in packaging economic opportunities
- Expertise in economic incentives
- Creation of a database of sites in Northwest Indiana with updates from Local Economic Development Organizations (LEDO).
- Promotion of business-ready commercial developments

Communities have the first line of responsibility to manage available land database information. The Forum also has taken steps and will continue to market Northwest Indiana to developers, site selectors, real estate brokers and targeted industries. The underutilization of land and brownfield sites has impacted the use of land and properties in urban areas. Brownfield remediation can create economic development opportunities and reinvestment in the urban core areas.

Employment Growth

Employment growth is difficult to predict. There are many factors that influence job creation, from local, state, federal, and international policies to the quality of civic amenities in an area. A change in any number of these factors can affect job growth and retention for years to come. The NWI region illustrates this point well; increased efficiency in the steel industry led to job losses in the 1980s that are still felt today. After rebounding in the 1990s, the latest recession has wiped out the gains made during that decade. At the low point in 2009, employment had fallen to levels roughly equal to that of 1970. However, while this news might be taken as a reason to be pessimistic, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about future job growth in the region.

In an increasingly globalizing economy, Northwest Indiana is positioned as the eastern gateway to a global city. While this fact has historically been downplayed, connections to Chicago will only rise in importance between now and 2040. Strengthening these ties both physically and mentally – through infrastructure development and building human relationships – will help the region thrive. In addition, maintaining and building upon the historical role as a transportation and freight corridor also presents an opportunity for economic growth, if we can make our region attractive as a destination for goods and people, not just a place to be passed through.

Looking out to 2040, we assume that job growth will occur, though not as quickly as in the 1990s. We assume that recent job losses are an anomaly, and that those jobs will return in some form or another. Overall, employment is expected to grow by about 80,000 jobs in comparison to the low point of the recession, or about 73,000 more jobs than at present. These numbers represent targets, or indicators of progress. They need not be taken as gospel. The real concern should not be how many jobs are added, but rather what type of jobs are created. Quality jobs are more important than quantity of jobs.

Education

The CRP “INvisions” a Northwest Indiana in 2040 that is vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united. A vibrant region means that our economy is thriving, our people are well-educated and our environment is clean. A well-educated population calls for expanded access to knowledge and educational opportunities. That is the goal. Objectives that have been identified to reach the goal of a well-educated population include:

- Develop a transportation system that provides safe and reliable access to educational facilities
- Maintain strategic partnerships with educational institutions
- Provide critical information to the public to enable meaningful public participation

- Educate leaders about best practices in urban and regional planning and public policy
- Improve infrastructure connectivity and access to the technology that supports distance education

Although education is not one of NIRPC’s planning domains, the issue of learning was often mentioned during public discussions as the CRP evolved. For example, during the Regional Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana in December 2008, education scored the third highest when the 500 attendees were asked to list their top region issue of interest. One of the most critical regional challenges identified by the group said that schools suffer from poor results, low graduation and unequal funding. “We are undereducated and underprepared for jobs.” One of the regional opportunities described at the Forum on the Future was “our universities can help drive innovation and train the workforce for 21st Century jobs.”

...our investment in providing high-quality learning opportunities will return an educated group of citizens well-positioned to solve the difficult sustainability issues now facing the region.

As a result of that event, elements of the vision for our region’s future declared, “High-quality education for all that prepares all our children to be productive citizens.” Although NIRPC has not expanded its planning domains to include educational recommendations and policies, it is necessary to briefly discuss here the state of education in the region. For the core communities to revitalize and become more desirable places to live and work, educational achievement must improve. Following are references from other studies that describe the issue.

The Quality of Life Council’s 2008 Indicators Report features education as one of the significant factors in determining how well the region is doing. The 2008 report says, “It is hard to over-emphasize the importance of education to quality of life. The students in our classrooms today will become the workforce and community leaders of the future. Further, our invest-

ment in providing high-quality learning opportunities will return an educated group of citizens well-positioned to solve the difficult sustainability issues now facing the region. ... Student performance varies widely across the region and appears strongly linked to socioeconomic opportunities. Clearly, more needs to be done to improve educational opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged populations.”

The 2008 Indicators Report goes on to say about grades K-12, “Many factors affect educational performance and attainment of Northwest Indiana’s students. Among the most clear is the connection between poverty and low educational achievement. While lower educational outcomes and attainment tend to occur in communities with high concentrations of minorities, this is due to poverty rather than to race. English as a second language has emerged as a concern as well. Finally, total expenditures per pupil can also impact the quality of education provided.”

The WorkOne Northern Indiana’s 2010 State of the Workforce Report discusses grades K-12 educational performance. “By looking at graduation rates for each school district, the geographic disparity of education in Northwest Indiana becomes abundantly clear. A quick glance at the map of graduation rates for school districts displays four distinct trends:

- The poorest performing school districts in the region are concentrated in the urban core of northern Lake County.
- The suburban and exurban collar communities that surround the urban core are performing above average or exceptionally well in some cases.
- Rural areas in the southern part of the region, the periphery of the suburban collar, are below the state average;
- The Michigan City-LaPorte area, the other urban/suburban core in the Region, also is below the state average although not as severely deficient as northern Lake County.

“Not all of the urban communities are performing poorly, nor are all rural areas below the state average. However, it is clear the region’s greatest challenge in improving the quality of high school education lies in overcoming

the geographic concentration of poorly performing schools in the northern urban core communities.”

The 2010 State of the Workforce also says, “A strong education system is often a necessary component in the high-stakes world of business attraction and recruitment. Businesses interested in moving locations or setting up a new plant demand to know the availability and quality of the labor force when they target particular communities.”

A vibrant region where the people are well-educated is attractive to employers that are considering expanding in or relocating to an area. Purdue University Calumet (PUC) Chancellor Howard Cohen had some words to say about PUC’s role in education and economic development in Northwest Indiana (May, 2005). His comments would seem to hold true to any institute of higher learning in the region. Chancellor Cohen said, “Cutting edge employers are attracted to regions inhabited by a plentiful population of college graduates, from which a skilled and marketable employee base can be recruited. The more college graduates there are with knowledge and skills of demand, the more opportunities there are for a region – Northwest Indiana – to respond effectively to the economic challenges of our 21st century society. Beyond the employer benefit of an educated work force, we know from research and experience that a college education produces an improved quality of life for its graduates. Quality of life typically translates into greater earning and spending power, which, of course, helps stimulate economic development, as well as opportunities to enjoy and partake of more of the good things society – local and otherwise – has to offer.”

The National Center for Higher Educational Management Systems said in a 2005 report, “Indiana must also address its ‘brain drain.’ Each year, the state gains citizens with low educational attainment while it loses thousands of workers with strong academic credentials. Creating more degrees will solve only part of the problem. Indiana needs to retain degree-holders and encourage their creativity to develop more opportunity for all Hoosiers.” The report was part of a State-Level Dashboard of Key Indicators in Reaching Higher:

Strategic Initiatives for Higher Education in Indiana, with data from 2005-2008. NIRPC is willing to work with others to address regional education issues as they relate to the vision, goals and objectives in the CRP.

Educational Achievement

Northwest Indiana exceeds the national high school graduation rate by a full two percentage points for people 25 and older. However, the tri-county area lags behind the rest of the nation when it comes to higher education. 48.1% of region residents older than 25 have completed some college, compared to 54.4% nationally. 19.7% of residents have earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 27.5% nationally, and only 6.5% hold a graduate degree, while 10.1% of all Americans have earned an advanced degree.

Attainment Level	Northwest IN / Cumulative			US / Cumulative	
Population 25 years and over	501,389				
Less than 9th grade	20,628	4.10%	100.00%	6.40%	100.00%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	47,190	9.40%	95.90%	9.10%	93.60%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	192,342	38.40%	86.50%	30.10%	84.50%
Some college, no degree	106,414	21.20%	48.10%	19.50%	54.40%
Associate's degree	35,859	7.20%	26.90%	7.40%	34.90%
Bachelor's degree	66,326	13.20%	19.70%	17.40%	27.50%
Graduate or professional degree	32,630	6.50%	6.50%	10.10%	10.10%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey Note: Although the American Community Survey (ACS) produces population, demographic and housing unit estimates, it is the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program that produces and disseminates the official estimates of the population for the nation, states, counties, cities and towns and estimates of housing units for states and counties.

Table IV.2 Educational Attainment, Northwest Indiana

Higher Education

Northwest Indiana is served by a number of colleges and universities conveniently located throughout the area. Valparaiso University is located in the heart of Porter County with a student population of 3,850. VU celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2009 and is considered one of the top liberal arts colleges in America. In addition to an outstanding undergraduate program, the University also offers more than 30 graduate degrees (or combinations of degrees) in 14 areas of study. Doctorate degrees are available in nursing and law.

Purdue University operates two campuses in the region. The Calumet campus has had a presence in Hammond since 1946. PUC currently enrolls roughly 9,000 students in its seven colleges, and offers graduate degrees in education. The North Central campus in Westville (LaPorte County) enrolls roughly 4,000 students. PNC has been located LaPorte County since 1948, and moved to its current location in 1967. PNC offers numerous degrees from its four colleges as well as two master's degrees.

Indiana University established its Northwest Indiana campus in Gary in 1963. IUN enrolls just fewer than 5,000 students, who can choose from numerous majors and master's degrees in five different fields with varying concentrations. IUN also has a medical school.



Munster High School athletes celebrate from the bench. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

St. Joseph's College operates one campus in the Region. Calumet College of St. Joseph was established in 1951 and has occupied its present location in Whiting since 1973. CCSJ offers majors in over 15 fields as well as a master's in teaching. There are more than 1,000 students attending the college.

Ivy Tech Community College is the state's community college and technical school system. More than 5,000 students attend at the school's four area campuses in East Chicago, Gary, Michigan City and Valparaiso. Among other colleges in the area are Hyles-Anderson College in Crown Point; Kaplan College, with campuses in Hammond and Merrillville; Brown-Mackie in Michigan City; University of Phoenix in Merrillville; Indiana Wesleyan in Merrillville; and Davenport University in Merrillville.

Tourism

The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four (24) hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited." The CRP "INvisions" a vibrant region where the economy is thriving and natural areas are valued and protected. The vision also speaks of a revitalized region where urban areas are renewed and our environment is clean, and to a region that is thriving economically, where the quality of life attracts businesses and residents.

These visions encompass the backbone of a region that is desirable for those visiting from other places both nationally, and internationally. Northwest Indiana, with its proximity to Chicago and abundance of lakefront activities, offers a strong attraction for visitors. This is reflected in a robust effort via three countywide tourism offices in the three Northwest Indiana counties. Each of these agencies focus visitors on their county's unique attributes, and with certain endeavors, they expand their vision into neighboring areas. Together these agencies target both visitors and residents of Northwest Indiana, and aim to educate them and promote the intrinsic beauty and natural wonders that make our region a destination for millions per year. This in turn generates a significant boost to our local economy, spread over a number of key employment sectors.

Regional Attractions

By far, the Indiana Dunes ranks as the most visited attraction in the NIRPC region. Stretching 25 miles from Gary east to Michigan City, the Indiana Dunes are recognized internationally as a marvel of nature, and represent one of the most ecologically diverse systems for plant and animal life in the world. They attract more than 4 million visitors per year to a number of beaches, campsites, historical features and nature trails. The Indiana Dunes are forever protected by both state and federal designations, which assure continual upkeep and the addition of enhancement projects. The Indiana Dunes represent the crown jewel of tourism in Northwest Indiana, and all three tourism bureaus use the Dunes as the gateway for further visitor exploration of the region.



Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

Of recent note is the town of Porter's 2011 "Gateway to the Indiana Dunes" report, which outlines a number of bold initiatives toward creating a true entranceway to the National Lakeshore and Indiana Dunes State Park. Improvement projects of note include significant landscaping along Ind. 49 to the State Park entrance, the inclusion

of a multiuse trail from downtown Porter to the beach entrance, and the promotion of properties for supporting businesses. These include hotels, restaurants and retail establishments to cater to the millions who visit the lakeshore every year. The intent is to create an attractive location so visitors will be encouraged to spend a few days in the area, and thus pump more of their discretionary income in our regional economy.



Proposed Dunes-Kankakee Trail, Porter

A growing focus of recent years is the burgeoning regional off-road trail network. As of 2010, Northwest Indiana enjoys more than 80 miles of developed trails, with approximately 50 miles slated for construction within the next five to 10 years. Buoyed by the abundance of abandoned railroads, a number of “rail-to-trail” projects have been brought online in Northwest Indiana. These trails range from major facilities (the 17-mile Erie-Lackawanna Trail) to local community connections (systems in St. John and Valparaiso). In 2008, NIRPC released the first comprehensive bike map that highlighted these systems. This map proved to be overwhelmingly popular, with more than 100,000 copies being quickly distributed. There have been inquiries about obtaining this map nationwide and internationally.

Off-road multiuse trails are often major tourist attractions generating expenditures on lodging, food and recreation-oriented services and improving the overall appeal of a community to tourists and new residents. They also serve as a major factor for business attraction and retention. The numbers help bear this out. In one example, a 2004 study of the 45-mile-long Washington & Old Dominion Trail, a transportation and recreation corridor running from Arlington to Purcellville, Va., finds that an estimated 1.7 million adult W&OD users put about \$7 million directly in the northern Virginia economy. In our state, the Monon Trail attracts 1.3 million visitors yearly, and is credited for reviving the Broad Ripple neighborhood of Indianapolis. The trail runs from the northeastern edge of downtown Indianapolis and runs north approximately 18 miles into the town of Westfield. In addition, the city of Carmel has taken the extraordinary step to redevelop its new downtown district with the Monon Trail running through the heart of the district, with both business and residential structures facing the facility.



Erie Lackawanna Trail, Griffith

Thus, it is no secret that off-road trails represent an under-tapped potential for regional tourism. Residents and outside visitors alike can enjoy a leisurely ride to a neighboring community and partake in their attractions. As an example, Erie-Lackawanna Trail ties directly into the downtown districts of Hammond, Highland, Griffith and Crown Point. The Prairie-Duneland offers similar opportunities from downtown Hobart to Chesterton. The potential for visitors and new economic growth is substantial. Since 1993, more than \$30 million in federal investment has been afforded to these regional trails, and the demand only has increased. NIRPC continues to champion regional trail systems, and aims to work with all three tourism agencies on their continued promotion and development.



Oak Savannah Trail, Hobart

On the topic of trails, since the advent of water trail planning upon the release of the 2007 Greenways & Blueways Plan, interest in access has soared. The establishment of the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA) in 2008 has had a profound impact in promoting water trail use in the region. Also, thanks to a grant from ArcelorMittal, NIRPC has been able to release two water trail maps along Lake Michigan and the Kankakee River. Other

systems under development include both Calumet Rivers, and local systems in Dyer, Lowell and Michigan City. Paddling represents an attractive escape and a potential lure for new tourism opportunities.



Sea kayaking on Lake Michigan

Beyond the natural amenities that Northwest Indiana offers, there are a number of other destinations that fuel regional tourism. The most notable involve the four casinos in Hammond, East Chicago, Gary and Michigan City. Each of these gaming and entertainment establishments draws millions of patrons per year, where a percentage of the gaming proceeds go back to the host communities.

Another attraction is the Radisson Hotel and Convention Center in Merrillville, where the 3,400 seat Star Plaza Theatre is located. The Star Plaza has served as the focal point for major entertainment acts since 1979, although new facilities have opened that cater to such events. In 2008, Horseshoe Casino opened The Venue - a 3,300-seat auditorium that can be sized according to the nature of the acts. In 2009, the Blue Chip Casino opened its 1,200-seat Stardust Event Center for smaller acts.

In addition to the entertainment establishments, there are two major sports facilities that currently host professional franchises. They are both located in downtown Gary and include The U.S. Steelyard, a 6,500- seat baseball stadium that hosts the Gary SouthShore Rail-Cats. The other is the Genesis Convention Center, that currently houses the Gary Splash of the International Basketball League. The Genesis Center has been a fixture in the city since 1981 and boasts the largest seating arena in the region at 7,000. The center is a flexible facility, able to house a number of events both large and small, with a significant amount of rooms for conferences. The Genesis Center also was the site of the 2001 and 2002 Miss USA Pageant.

Regarding theme parks, Deep River Waterpark in Merrillville serves as the largest outdoor water-themed amusement park in the Chicagoland area. The park, managed by Lake County Parks, boasts a number of attractions for those of all ages. Yearly attendance for the swimming season averages approximately 300,000 visitors. Recently, the park was expanded and now is open for ice skating during the winter season.



Deep River Waterpark, Merrillville



Star Plaza Theatre, Merrillville



U.S. Steelyard, Gary. Photo by Samuel A. Love via Flickr.

Countywide Efforts

Apart from the consensus on the regional attractions, each tourism agency in Northwest Indiana continues to employ new strategies to bring more attention, and visitors, to our region. The South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority (SSCVA) in Lake County long has been an advocate of promoting the region. Its premiere event is the Gary South Shore Air Show along Marquette Park Beach. The annual summer event draws hundreds of thousands to Marquette Park Beach in Gary. The SSCVA Visitors Center in Hammond is also an attraction all-in-itself as the location of the John Dillinger Museum, and a large exposition area that hosts a variety of exhibits year-round. The SSCVA is also the host for the yearly South Shore Futures LPGA golf tournament in Crown Point.

The Indiana Dunes Tourism (IDT) office is located in the town of Porter, and serves as Porter County's chief tourism agency. The IDT works out of the Dorothy Buell Visitors Center, which also serves as the main visitors site for Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and Indiana Dunes State Park. The IDT has recently launched an ambitious marketing endeavor called the "Beyond the Beach Discovery Trail," which guides visitors to more than 50 sites that showcase the region's natural and cultural treasures. The trail is not a traditional linear system, but a series of destinations throughout the three-county region.

The LaPorte County Convention and Visitors Bureau (LCCVB) operates out of Michigan City and serves to market attractions in the LaPorte-Michigan City vicinity. A main event is its R.O.S.E., or Recognition of Service Excellence Awards program. R.O.S.E. started in May 1999, to highlight LaPorte County's exceptional individuals who provide service above and beyond most others. It now works alongside IDT to recognize those in Porter County as well.



Gary South Shore Air Show, Marquette Park Beach



Indiana Welcome Center, Hammond



Local Attractions

On a community level, attractions and destinations abound. There are many historic areas of interest throughout all of Northwest Indiana that offer a broad selection of antiques and feature cultural landmarks. Each county seat – Crown Point, Valparaiso and LaPorte – boast a vibrant downtown square that has become a destination for many region residents and tourists alike. Other downtowns, such as Chesterton and Hobart, have a rich tradition and unique charm. Downtown Highland is an example of a restored district where a significant investment has been afforded.

An annual summer tradition includes the county fairs. In addition to these mainstays, several communities hold festivals celebrating their heritage and civic pride. Of note include Crown Point's Hometown Days, Valparaiso's Popcorn Festival and Hammond's Festival of the Lakes. There also are two major events that draw thousands of visitors from out of town. These include the Pierogi Fest, which draws almost 200,000 visitors to the city of Whiting each year. Then there is Three Floyds Brewery's Dark Lord Day in Munster. Dark Lord has rapidly become a beer-connoisseur's destination, with 6,000 attending the spring event yearly.

Northwest Indiana has enjoyed a renaissance of new activity along the lakeshore thanks to the Marquette Lakefront Reinvestment Plan, and funding from the Regional Development Authority (RDA). This document has served as a vital blueprint towards a number of high-impact projects that aim to make the Lake Michigan shoreline a premiere destination. As of 2011, endeavors have included the aforementioned Gateway to the Dunes project in Porter, Portage Lakefront Park and Riverwalk, the redevelopment of Whiting Lakefront Park and Marquette Park in Gary, and the construction of an iconic pavilion and redesigned Forsythe Park along Wolf Lake in Hammond. All of these projects also have included many new miles of off-road trails.

At left, from top to bottom:
Pierogi Fest, Whiting, photo by M. Jeremy Goldman via Flickr; Portage Lakefront Pavilion;
Old Lake County Courthouse, Crown Point

Toward the Future

Taken together, the destinations as outlined in this section offer an exciting future for the Northwest Indiana in emerging as a key tourist destination for regional, national and international visitors. The tourism economy related directly to the four key visions outlined throughout the 2040 Plan, which includes a region that is vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united. All these visions are positively impacted by perceptions of visitors and residents alike, and Northwest Indiana is positioning itself ideally for this, and future generations to share and enjoy.



IU Northwest Teach-In. Photo by Bernard Pollock via Flickr.



Visitors to the region from Korea. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Analysis of Economic Development Problems & Opportunities

In 2006, and then again in 2010, NIRPC conducted an assessment of economic conditions in Northwest Indiana. Most recently working with the NWIEDD, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threat analysis were prepared around which economic policy and actions could be developed. The 2010 analysis revealed the following:

Strengths:

- Proximity to Chicago
- Adjacent to Lake Michigan, Dunes and Kankakee River
- Existing highway and rail infrastructure
- Port of Indiana
- South Shore Commuter Rail
- Gary/Chicago International Airport
- Regional Development Authority
- Intergovernmental collaboration
- Diversified manufacturing base
- Universities and colleges
- Low cost of living
- Cultural diversity
- Recreational/entertainment venue
- Skilled work force
- Available land
- Public financing tools
- Health care/life sciences
- Stable business tax climate
- Comprehensive economic development planning
- Top current and potential clusters (industries) identified
- Fiber infrastructure in progress
- Comprehensive land use map in progress

Weaknesses:

- Nondiversified economic base
- Work force not skilled in emerging clusters
- Perceived brain drain
- Competition among regional entities
- K-12 education in certain areas
- Urban core decay
- No scheduled commercial air service
- Lack of corporate headquarters
- No strong sense of regional identity
- Misperception as having high wage rates/labor costs
- Nonattainment status for air quality
- Need for identification and assembly of underutilized properties
- No regional land use plan
- Lack of regional transit system
- Lack of stormwater planning

Opportunities:

- Partnerships with higher education to provide customized job skill training
- Increased number of high school graduates moving on to college
- Leverage the aggressive investment in fiber optic infrastructure
- Access more federal dollars
- Reskill the existing work force into high potential cluster areas
- Expand commerce at Gary/Chicago International Airport
- Pursue the Marquette Plan: Indiana's Lakeshore Reinvestment Strategy (Phase I and Phase II)
- NICTD expansion to serve the broader region with commuter rail service
- Expand the regional Public Transit System
- Capitalize on state incentives

- Develop and implement regional marketing effort
- Increase tourism
- Develop new high potential clusters (industries)
- Develop a multimodal infrastructure
- Improve air quality
- Develop a Regional Land Use Plan
- Establish fully developed business parks
- Identification of underutilized properties
- High-speed rail

Threats:

- Declining jobs in core clusters (industries)
- Overshadowed by Chicago media
- Lack of resources to address urban decay
- Peotone airport becomes the third Chicago airport
- Resistance to systematic planning
- Providing services to an aging population
- Ability to retain young, creative professionals
- Lack of corporate headquarters
- Fear of negative impacts of development
- Negative impacts created by development
- Potential flooding

The 2040 CRP goals and objectives related to ensuring a thriving economy and strong work force were developed in response to the findings of this analysis, in addition to other feedback received from stakeholders in the planning process. The resulting plan and policy recommendations seek to build on regional strengths and opportunities, and address the identified weaknesses and threats.

Plan & Policy Recommendations

The 2040 CRP describes a vision and establishes a direction for economic development and enhancement of human capital in the region. Through the regional planning process, NIRPC has identified the opportunity for an additional 80,000 jobs by the year 2040. In order to capture this level of job formation, the region must continue to organize and align itself with the demands of the regional and national economy for service, technology, manufacturing and related industries. NIRPC has and will continue to have a very active role in regional economic development.

The Northwest Indiana Economic Development District (NWIEDD) examined a cluster analysis as a strategy to identify the greatest potential for growth in Northwest Indiana. This analysis showed the emerging industry clusters of transportation, distribution and logistics; advanced manufacturing; IT/technology; and professional and medical services with the most significant growth potential. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy report provides an in-depth examination and breakdown of the cluster analysis (CEDS, Pgs. 57-64).

Economic Development Strategies

NIRPC's support for economic development throughout the region will occur in a variety of ways. The following core economic development strategies are directly related to the mission and role of NIRPC in the region:

- **Land Use and Multimodal Transportation** – With NIRPC's regional role in transportation, environmental and land use resource guidance, it is well positioned to continue to assist the region to attract state and federal resources that can be leveraged in the interest of economic development. State and federal policy focusing on multimodal transportation systems integrated with existing communities suggests that those that develop regional investment strategies structured around integrated land use and transportation concepts should benefit from state and federal funding.

- **Education and Job Development** – Working with other agencies, NIRPC will continue to support improved scholastic performance in Northwest Indiana. While education in and of itself is not a core function of NIRPC's mission, improved education plays a central role in the economic advancement of the region. NIRPC's interest will be to support education for this purpose.
- **Advancement of Northwest Indiana Top Industry Clusters** - Several actions can be undertaken by NIRPC to support regional economic development in the area's emerging industry clusters. As described above, these include:
 - Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL)
 - Advanced Manufacturing
 - IT/technology
 - Professional and Medical Services

According to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy implementation process, further analysis will assist in determining the areas of each cluster that are most worthy of attention for additional development.

- **Job Creation and Green Jobs** – Through the development of the region's priority industry clusters, there will be significant opportunities. In addition, the opportunity for jobs that support the green economy will emerge. For instance, the ArcelorMittal Energy Recovery and Reuse Project will provide significant energy reduction and environmental benefits. Working with its economic development partners, the means to incent projects such as these in the region should continue to be identified.
- **Industrial Sector Support** - The existing industries have been the core of employment and economic opportunities in the region. Economic cluster analysis for the region shows continued

strength in primary metals manufacturing and petroleum and coals products manufacturing. Opportunities exist for agribusiness, food processing technology and computer and electronic products manufacturing. Funding and finance, job training and placement and adequate sites and infrastructure will be needed to support these investments.

- **Freight** - Northwest Indiana lies at the center of a global multimodal freight network. This location continues to be a strategic advantage for economic development. Stated quite simply, a safe, reliable and efficient freight network reduces the cost of bringing in raw materials and moving goods to market. This savings benefits the whole region: It keeps business costs low – ensuring our business and industry are competitive - and keeps consumer prices down – which means residents have more money to save, spend or invest.

In addition to cost savings, the movement, handling and storing of freight generates significant direct employment. Analysis at both the state and regional levels confirms that the Transportation, Distribution and Logistics cluster – of which freight is a major component - is a top industry cluster with potential for growth.

Capitalizing on these infrastructure advantages and economic opportunities is a key strategy for revitalizing Northwest Indiana. Critical freight routes must be identified and maintained. Conflict and choke points must be improved. Planning efforts and regional transportation funding must support intermodal and multimodal coordination. Efforts are underway in each of the three Northwest Indiana counties to develop multimodal freight hubs around the intersections of existing freight infrastructure. NIRPC is working with public officials and private sector operators to identify the appropriate locations for industrial and freight-related development and to develop effective multimodal links between them.



IUN medical students at Methodist Hospitals in Merrillville assist prosecutors with a criminal investigation. Photo courtesy iun.edu.



Region grocery shopper. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Economic Development Programs

NIRPC participates in or supports a variety of economic development-related programs in the region. While programs will vary over time, the following list provides an indication of the range and depth for which NIRPC can provide assistance. We expect these programs to evolve over the next 20 to 30 years.

- **NWI Economic Development District** - The NWI Economic Development District is a partnership between NIRPC and the Forum that is becoming a central avenue responsible for regional economic development. The NWIEDD serves as a state coordinator and clearinghouse for regional economic development grant requests. With NIRPC's input and support, the district is responsible for the preparation and upkeep of the CEDS document. Furthermore, the district board will be responsible for establishing a sustainable and productive process to manage the implementation of the CEDS. The implementation will include the identification and prioritization of EDA investments in Northwest Indiana. The NWIEDD also will be a conduit to identify other potential federal funding sources for investment in the region. Up until this time, individual municipalities had developed independent economic development strategies for their own communities. From now on, the district will review, identify and prioritize the submission of projects to receive EDA funding and other sources.
- **Shovel-Ready Sites** - An important tool in attracting businesses is the availability of certified shovel-ready sites. The Shovel Ready Program is a new state initiative through the IEDC, created to help communities certify sites as "ready for development." This provides a competitive advantage for the region and reduces potential costs of site development for businesses and enhances the marketability of certified sites, thus creating jobs. Currently, there are certified Shovel Ready sites located in:
 - Hobart, Lake County
 - LaPorte, LaPorte County (www.iedc.in.gov)
- **The Regional Development Co. and the Small Business Development Center** - The mission of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is to help Indiana businesses grow and create new jobs within

the state. The SBDC provides free and low-cost information, management counseling and educational services designed to support Indiana small business owners and potential entrepreneurs, including assistance with business plan development. The Regional Development Company (RDC) is a private, non-profit Indiana corporation that was certified by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to administer the SBA 504 Loan Program for seven Indiana counties: Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Jasper, Newton, Starke and Pulaski. The program gives closely held small business owners access to the same capital markets as the larger publicly traded companies. It also assists local communities in creating and retaining jobs and increasing their tax base by stimulating business investment into plants and equipment. The loan program blends private capital, bank financing and government bonds to provide long-term, fixed asset financing to eligible healthy, expanding and creditworthy businesses.

- **Certified Technology Parks** - The Certified Technology Parks Program (CTP) was created by the IEDC as a tool to support the attraction and growth of high-technology business in Indiana and promote technology transfer opportunities. Two CTPs in Northwest Indiana include Purdue Technology Center of Northwest Indiana in Crown Point and the Hammond Technology Park.
- **Land Assembly Assistance** - NIRPC will continue to partner with the Forum on creating a stronger understanding of the value of land assembly in the region. NIRPC's Land Use Committee and the Forum partnered and held a Land Assembly Seminar in late 2010. Both agencies will work together to host additional seminars and develop programs promoting the need for land assembly using land use and transportation infrastructure components. The Forum will continue to support efforts by LEDO to undertake land assembly efforts.
- **Coordination between Education (universities), work force development leaders and economic development** - Northwest Indiana is rich with educational opportunities with many renowned universities. Partnerships with higher education in-

stitutions to provide customized job training skills that meet the needs of the region's current and emerging employers are needed. Retraining the existing work force for employment in high growth cluster areas should be a priority.

- **Technology – Broadband Fiber Optics** - The Forum has completed a Broadband Study that included the identification of broadband, fiber-optic transportation connectivity for Northwest Indiana. Northwest Indiana, to remain economically competitive, must establish a high-quality broadband network to attract business and industry. The Forum is leading this initiative with NIRPC's technical support. The result will be a new regional technology infrastructure in Northwest Indiana, identifying hot spots and areas for additional development.

www.nwiforum.org

- **Technology - JumpStart Initiative** - NIRPC encourages entrepreneurial opportunity and will continue to support the partnership between the NWIEDD and the JumpStart initiative as it works toward the development of a Regional Entrepreneurial Action Plan (REAP). This business plan will accelerate and enhance the growth of entrepreneurship, identify more support services, more capital and provide connections. The initiative is a multiyear, three-phase project that will:

- Prepare an action plan to enhance the entrepreneurial network
- Raise funds to implement the action plan

- Implement the action plan

- **Northwest Indiana Society of Innovators** - NIRPC also supports the mission and work of the Northwest Indiana Society of Innovators. The mission of this organization is to “celebrate the creativity and engage the diversity of Northwest Indiana by seeking out and rewarding innovations from all walks of life for their innovations that benefit this region as our contribution toward a culture.”

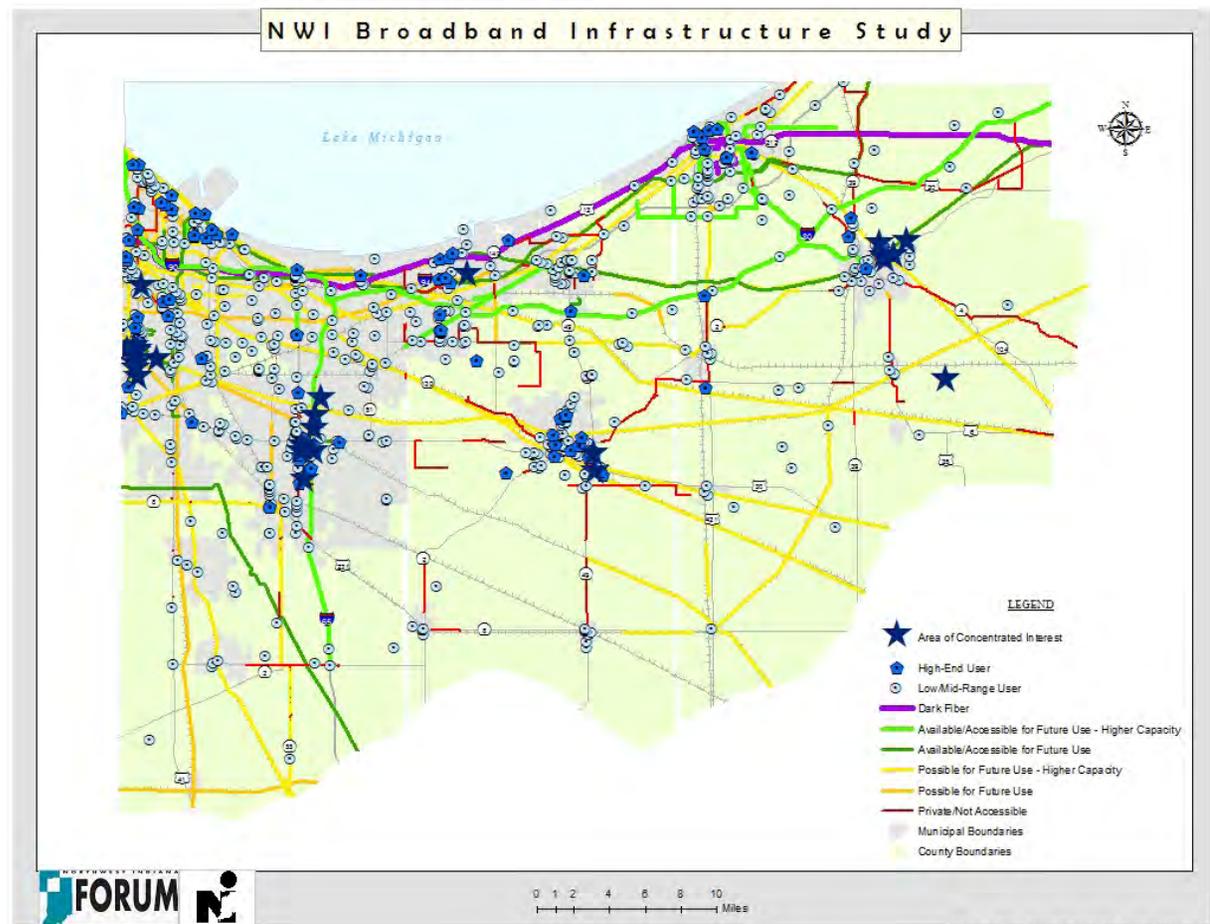


Figure IV.3 Existing Broadband Infrastructure

Local Food & Our Local Economy

As stated in the CRP's goals, we desire a globally competitive, diversified economy that protects and enhances our natural environment. The Local Food Study sees opportunities for local agriculture to grow the economy of the region. More than 50% of our land is devoted to agriculture, yet only one half of 1% of our population earns its living from farming, while our number of farms and farmers continues to shrink.⁶ Furthermore, farmers in our region earn, on average, only 75% of what a farmer typically earns in our state.⁷ Although our fields are dominated by corn and soy, just 0.1% of our farmland grows fresh fruits and vegetables, yet the sales from these crops make up a full 5% of the total market value of agricultural products for the region.⁸ A strengthened local food system will produce higher value food and capture the greatest amount of that value within our region by maximizing technology, productivity, and efficiency at every step, from farming practices and distribution methods to marketing techniques, composting initiatives, and redevelopment of land through urban agriculture.

0.1% of our farmland that grows fresh fruits and vegetables make up a full 5% of the total market value of agricultural products for the region.

Objectives that address local food and our economy:

- *Maximize technology, productivity and efficiency of existing core industries*—Agriculture occupies a greater percentage of our region's land than all other industries combined, yet the agricultural sector accounts for a small percentage of our total economy. Local food, especially high value products like meat, poultry, fruits, and vegetables, could boost the economic productivity of the agricultural sector. Improving technology and efficiency of the local food system is necessary to rebuild the deteriorated infrastructure that supported local foods before the rise of

industrial agriculture. If we hope local food to boost our region's economy, we must maximize the technology, efficiency and productivity of the local food system.

- *Create diverse, emerging and sustainable industries*—An emerging local food system could create diversity through offering a more sustainable alternative to our mainstream food system. While the world still may rely on corn and soy products from our commodity crop fields, and the region may continue to depend on some foods from across the world, a diversified food system that balances local, regional, and global markets will provide a more secure and resilient food supply for our region. Local foods have the potential for increasing economic, social, and environmental sustainability in the region.
- *Strengthen public/private partnerships resulting in increased regional investment*—The local food system will have the most impact if public/private partnerships are able to jump-start the creation or rehabilitation of appropriately scaled infrastructure.
- *Improve the work force of the region to accommodate growth in emerging industries*—Local food is an emerging industry that will require a diverse labor force across the supply chain—from agricultural specialists, farm workers, processors, distributors, logistics experts, marketing, chefs, sales, waste retrieval and composting.
- *Improve overall quality of life to attract businesses and residents*—The ability to eat high-quality local food has become a measure of quality of life. By supporting our local food system in Northwest Indiana, we will enhance the quality of life for existing residents, possibly attract new residents, and increase opportunities for local food entrepreneurs.

⁶ Indiana Department of Workforce Development, data from 2005-2009 and USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture.

⁷ Indiana Department of Workforce Development, data from 2005-2009.

⁸ USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture.

Strategies for Core Communities

The 2040 CRP places emphasis on reinvestment and redevelopment of the region's core communities, particularly focusing on Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City. Support for the economic health and vitality for the region's core communities was an important theme throughout the planning process. While a number of initiatives have been defined as part of the Phase I and Phase II Marquette Lakeshore Revitalization Plan, the following initiatives were identified as important actions for the core communities. To the extent possible, we'll support communities in these efforts.

Gary

- Gary/Chicago International Airport – Continued airside improvements, including runways and landside improvements focused on supporting land development strategies
- Midwest High Speed Rail – Gary is the preferred location for a high-speed rail station planned to be situated at the airport as part of the South of the Lakes alignment.

Michigan City

- Support the South Shore Railroad relocation with the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District in downtown for congestion relief, safety and transit supportive development opportunities
- Support long-term redevelopment efforts of the NIPSCO lakefront property
- Continue to support local job creation efforts

East Chicago

- Plan for bigger lots/parcel sizes to better accommodate infill development
- Support the redevelopment and improvement of two downtown subareas – the historical downtown and the new Indiana Harbor
- Support tourism, continue working with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management on beach closures on the lakefront, tourism concerns
- Continue to diversify the service sector and expand the industrial sector
- Attract a significant university campus or presence to the downtown area
- Improve retailing along Columbus Drive in the downtown area though enhanced traffic volumes

Hammond

- Expand Cline Avenue north of Interstate 94 (issue with the bridge)
- Encourage the improvement of Indianapolis Boulevard Bridge over the railroad yard while maintaining vacant lands for potential industrial development
- Support recreation as an economic development strategy
- Move City Hall downtown
- Improve the amount and quality of retail development on Indianapolis Boulevard
- Resolve Little Calumet River floodplain issues
- Encourage redevelopment of the Glidden paint factory on Summer Street
- Complete the U.S. 20 connection across the state line in Illinois

Support for Ongoing Projects & Initiatives

There are a variety of planning and development initiatives under way within the region, and many more to begin over the course of the planning period. NIRPC supports the efforts of its partner agencies, stakeholders and others interests in economic development within the region. While NIRPC supports economic development advancements in the core communities in general, in particular it supports the following agencies and efforts:

- Regional Development Authority initiatives, and the following four projects in particular:
 - Gary/Chicago International Airport development
 - NICTD service enhancements and improvements
 - Regional bus – current and future expanded bus service, fixed route, demand response and complimentary paratransit service
 - Northwest Indiana shoreline development – through the Marquette Lakeshore Revitalization Plan
- Local Economic Development Organizations (LEDO's) provide local communities' economic development plans and projects
- The Northwest Indiana Forum
- Indiana state agencies and partners such as:
 - Indiana Economic Development Corp. (IEDC)
 - Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center (NWiSDC)
 - Regional Development Co. (RDC)
 - Construction Advancement Foundation (CAF)
 - Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB)
 - Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA)
 - Northwest Indiana Quality of Life Council Inc. (QLC)

Northwest Indiana maintains a strong health care and post-secondary educational system. Major institutional investments in core community downtowns are recommended as a means of anchoring larger scale redevelopment and employment generation. For example, the location of a major health care facility in a downtown setting will stimulate the demand for jobs, new housing, support services and retail all proximate to the facility. Such institutional investment will help establish stability and growth opportunities in core community areas, and NIRPC will support these efforts.



Regional road worker. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Best Practices

Currently, there are a number of activities taking place across region that contribute to improvements related to human and economic resources. These include:

- **One Region, One Vision – Education Summit (education to a better economy)**
 - Seek collaboration between school superintendents, universities and work force
 - Promote opportunities for school superintendents to discuss and share current and future strategic initiatives to prepare college and career readiness
- **ArcelorMittal – Partnerships with schools and universities**
 - Steelworker initiative – interns and apprentices from local universities and community colleges work at ArcelorMittal and eventually have a higher chance of becoming full-time employees.
- **Major Industries and educational partnerships**
 - Council on Adult Experiential Learning is working with local manufacturers and starting on a regional focus for manufacturing and skilled labor.



Performer from DancExcel, the Champion Center for Creative Arts Education in Gary. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Performance Measures

There are a variety of ways to measure the success of economic development efforts as defined by the 2040 CRP goals and objectives. Economic sector performance can be monitored through a series of quality-of-life indicators and performance measures. Performance measures are used to assess and quantify the success of these sectors and the projected growth for the region.

Performance measures include:

- Unemployment
- Per capita income
- Population growth
- Environmental impact
- Number of jobs created
- Dollars of private sector investment
- Median household income
- Educational attainment levels
- Increase in assessed evaluation



Dancers at Indian cultural event. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Implementation

The following are implementation strategies NIRPC can support in improving the human and economic environment of NWI:

- Provide planning and programming of infrastructure to economic development and supply assistance and support to NWIEDD
- Support other partner organizations, such as the Forum, Indiana Economic Development Corp., the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center, the Regional Development Co., Northwest Indiana Workforce Board and the Center of Workforce Innovations in their efforts to improve the economic benefits of NWI.
- Proceed with action steps of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:
 - Apply to the EDA for a planning grant to ensure momentum and Board commitment gained since the beginning of the CEDS effort will continue into implementation
 - Establish effective implementation processes to identify high-potential projects, update the CEDS and monitor project performance
 - NWIEDD will assist organizations with high-potential projects to secure funds through the EDA and other sources by sourcing funding options, providing application guidance and establishing performance metrics.
 - The NWIEDD Board will update the CEDS to incorporate new projects and changes in the economic environment in NWI.

- Regional Development Authority should be encouraged to support other economic development activities beyond its four initiatives/projects.
- NIRPC should routinely assess and identify economic impacts of its transportation planning process and selection of projects.



Regional job fair. Photo courtesy the Times of Northwest Indiana.

