



**COMMITTEE MEETING ~ NIRPC AUDITORIUM
JANUARY 23, 2014
MINUTES**

Members & Guests – Don Parker, Nicole Barker, Mark O'Dell, Jenny Orsburn, Matt Keiser, Tim Cole, John Novacich, Leslie Phemister, Chris Moore, Craig Zandstra, Bruce Spires, Kevin Crawford, Dave Collins, Walter Lenckos, Jim Mandon, Dan Morford, LeAaron Foley, Chuck Ventura

Phone Participants – Christopher Meyers, Brian Niksch

Staff – Mitch Barloga, Jack Eskin, Belinda Petrosky, Meredith Stilwell

Chairman Dick called the meeting to order at 1:40 p.m. with self-introductions.

Ped

South Shore Trails - Update

The group is in the process of planning activities for the year and are hoping to become the focus point of the local incarnation of the League of American Bicyclists' American Bike Challenge 2014. They are also working with Save the Dunes and NIRPC regarding bikes on trains. To join South Shore Trails the application can be downloaded from their website, www.southshoretrails.org. Interested parties can also contact Don Parker, Kevin Crawford, Tim Cole or Mitch Barloga. Membership is \$20 per year.

Pedal

Presentation: NICTD BIKES ON TRAINS STUDY – Jack Eskin & Belinda Petrosky

NIRPC has been working with Save the Dunes to study the feasibility of bikes on the South Shore line. Regular bikes are currently not allowed on the NICTD trains, but demands and benefits were obvious enough for NICTD that they agreed for the opportunity to be addressed in a technical study. It will be an engineering study to assess the feasibility of accommodating bicycles on NICTD trains. The scope of work will involve 6 components: review of successful bikes on trains programs; an inventory of NICTD's trains, stations and service; an assessment of the implementation barriers; establish a series of preferred alternatives; identify a recommended alternative and identify potential funding, both private and public, to help finance the preferred alternative. Deliverables will be a full report and a summary report on completion of scope of work tasks.

FTA funding with a 20% match is being used for the study. The 20% is being provided by nine stakeholders which include Arcelor-Mittal, NICTD, National Parks Conservation Association, Porter County, LaPorte County, Northwest Indiana RDA, NIPSCO and the Greenways Foundation. Total funding is \$205k. Jack reviewed the timeline for the study begins with the public comment period on amending the study into the 2014-2017 TIP from January 25 through February 5 and culminates with a report and final project review hopefully by March 2015. During the process an advisory committee will be established which set project selection criteria, send a grant amendment to FTA to be finalized as well as review the project proposals and select a consultant.

The project has to be included into the TIP, which will be an amendment which requires approval from the Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) and then the NIRPC Board. This will probably occur at the February meetings and approvals are anticipated. Both the TPC and NIRPC Board meetings are open to the public. Public comment will be accepted at this meeting, by email, phone and social media. 3PCs involvement in the process will include appointment a member to the advisory committee, providing the consultant with technical documents, providing public comment and keeping the public informed on the progress and results of the study. *Discussion was held with questions raised regarding an all-in policy with no restrictions, progress reports and what they will look like and how will outside organizations see these reports. Jack informed the group that the study results would need to be seen for policies to be set and how progress reports will look and be transmitted has not been discussed yet. Nicole Barker added it took two years to make this happened and that many people were instrumental in this effort.*

Public comment period was opened to the group with the following comments given and questions raised:

- Don Parker noted and recommended an article in League of American Bicyclists magazine on bikes on trains. A separate article in the issue delves into a possible need for planning for a new nationwide non-motorized transportation strategy. The article listed 15 commuter railroads with their bikes on trains policy and only two did not have a policy with NICTD being one of them. Leslie Phemister clarified that there are 23 commuter lines in the United States and 20 allow bikes.
- Chris Moore commented that he was all for the bikes on trains and thinks it's a great idea, but thought there could be backlash on the time it will take for people to physically get their bikes on the train. He questioned if there would any type of systems or provisions to help families with children get all of the bicycles on the train. *Jack Eskin responded that the study is an engineering study and being initiated to answer those types of questions on boarding, storage, platform configuration, etc.*
- Don Parker commented that in his understanding Chris's concern has to do in part with NICTD's desire to eventually replace their rolling stock to double decker coaches which have a wider double center door. All of these concerns are part of the issue of how it gets done, whether it affects trip time, etc.
- Chris Moore asked if there are a couple of stations that have stairs to be walked up to get to the train. When responded to that there are he then asked if those will be left or if those stations will be upgraded. *Jack responded that NICTD is in the process of building elevated platforms at stations where it is structurally feasible. Because of the American's with Disabilities Act, this is something which they would like to do on all their stations. If an alternative is reached, but is only feasible at stations in which there are elevated platforms that could be an end scenario. Jack felt that at this point, NICTD is willing to have everything on the table to understand what are the conditions and scenarios of every situation at every station before committing to any alternative.* Leslie Phemister commented that pretty much throughout the United States the policy is you must be 12 or older to bring your bicycle on a train and would probably be the policy here too. She also addressed the stairs at stations issue stating that at CTA and Metra stations people carry their bikes up the stairs and little ramps for bicycle wheels have been installed beside the stairs; there are easy fixes that can be done or the bike is just picked up and carried.
- Chris Moore asked if NICTD was on board with the bikes on trains idea and are they going to help out. *Jack responded that the consultant will be working with NICTD engineering team. He feels that whatever solution is reached it will be highly context specific. NIRPC is helping manage the process of the study but it will be getting into the deep engineering details of how NICTD transit stations are structured and how people flow through them.*
- Don Parker commented that they think that this represents the beginning of a change. He stated no criticism of NICTD, but they had purely hard-nosed, our job is to move people reasons for looking at the ways they thought this wouldn't work and to see changes now through the board members and through the efforts at people sitting at this table (in attendance at the 3PC meeting) they are starting to look at ways this can be made to work.
- Chris Moore asked Leslie Phemister if NICTD can get grants or money if they do this. *Leslie responded that there are grants out there that can fund things like this. She commented CMAQ would probably be the easiest one to get because it would eliminate car trips.* Chris clarified that he didn't mean a grant to do the project but he meant an award or bonus for NICTD for participating in something like this. *Leslie responded not the she is aware of.*
- Walter Lenkos asked for light to be shed on the NICTD support involved and questioned if this was a unanimous vote from their board to move forward with the study. *Belinda Petrosky responded that she was not positive but did not think the NICTD board put it to a vote. This has been an ongoing conversation for a number of years and as far as she knows the only formal action on NICTD's part was John Parsons calling Nicole Barker to say let's get the feasibility study done. Jack Eskin noted that work has largely been with the NICTD staff and has been fairly internal.*
- Walter recommended to the group to make sure that there is a process for implementation. Don Parker commented that his first question when he heard about the study being done was regarding

implementation and he completely agrees that there needs to be a real, honest mechanism for how it gets implemented. *Jack responded that from the NICTD board's perspective they know the train line needs to evolve and this is very much in line with the strategic business plan they are doing now and they realize they have lost ridership in the last six years and to continue to be viable they are going to have to be a slightly different creature than they are currently. This study is just one piece of evolving and they are also trying to deal with looking at potential new lines. He feels the board and agency as a whole are understanding that evolution is a good thing, but they have more immediate concerns than this on an everyday level.*

- Leslie Phemister questioned if the consultant could produce some type of implementation chart (i.e. near-term, mid-term, long-term things that can be done). *Jack Eskin responded absolutely and Nicole Barker added that it is important to know that although called a feasibility study, the consultants have to come up with at least two actionable options. She feels one of the advantages of having NIRPC administer the project rather than NICTD themselves is it that it won't be just their judgments but the whole region and the whole teams' judgments as to what might or might not work. She strongly feels that no matter what option is selected it will take a lot of money and resources as well as political realities to consider. She wants them to not feel alone in the process since this is the region's community train system and it if comes to having to do advocacy down state with specific decision makers she hopes that there will be a strong team ready to help NICTD make it happen for the region. Jack continued that these things happen in a staggered process and opportunities for whatever the recommended alternative is at the end of the process, having a document that has done all these deep studies makes it more possible and more viable for new, potential funding sources to direct whatever it ends up being.*
- Kevin Crawford commented that it was his understanding that the new cars NICTD has been getting are the same cars that are in the Metra electric line and those cars will make this whole project more feasible because they have wider doors. He thinks that instead of changing out the whole stock, but is maybe just more about making smaller modifications to the newer cars.
- Leslie Phemister commented she has been doing research on all the commuter lines in the United States and there are a lot more than two possibilities and will just be a matter of what NICTD chooses that they would like to do. She stated there are possibilities to make it happen tomorrow and there are possibilities to make it happen when they get millions of dollars. *Jack responded that hopefully all of these things will come out in the study and will be brought to light. In the case of gallery cars, which are the double decker cars like Metra runs, they are only run during rush hour but maybe if those are phased in over time it could just be part of a gradual solution.*
- Kevin Crawford commented that this is what their coalition has been about this entire time. They never assumed everything would be working fine off the bat, but to get started with what could be done easily now.
- Nicole Barker commented there is a Facebook page called *We Want Bikes on the South Shore* where information will be posted.
- Matt Keiser questioned who is overseeing the project and whether it is the NIRPC board or just certain stakeholders. *Belinda explained that NIRPC was asked to be the applicant in this case and the source of funds being used to do the study are 5307, Urban Planning funds. There were a considerable amount of funds left over when the Regional Bus Authority went out of business. Because that money is already under NIRPC's control and is made available for regional studies that impact a broader need, when NIRPC was asked to be the applicant it made sense since only certain entities can be applicants. Belinda will submit the grant electronically, NIRPC will be responsible for putting the paperwork through as the grant is expended and will be receiving the invoices and paying the consultant upon specific deliverables at specific points and times. In the meantime, a stakeholder advisory committee will be formed to tighten the criteria and select the consultant; once they are selected the committee will work with the consultant to finalize the contract, deliverables and time table. NIRPC and the consultants will have to sign the contract, but the actual monitoring of the project and dealings with the consultant will be the responsibility of the stakeholder advisory committee. The consultant will report the committee as well and does not necessarily report to NIRPC board unless that is something the advisory committee thinks should be done.*

- Matt questioned if the committee would be made up of 3PC members or if the Executive Board selects the committee. *Belinda clarified the committee would be made up of a representative from each of the local match funders if they choose to appoint a representative, and one appointment from 3PC. There is no set rules that those are the only representatives allowed, but too many people is not desirable. It will be a commitment of time as all RFPs have to be read and rated and period meetings throughout the project will be held.*
- Leslie Phemister questioned if there is a representative from the conductor's union on the committee. *Jack responded that there had been talks with John Parsons regarding if he wanted railroad representation and there will be a NICTD representative.* Leslie explained that when Metra agreed to allow bikes on trains, the conductors were against it and that is something to think about. Nicole Barker commented that a necessary part of the consultant's work will be working deeply with the union and the day to day line workers.
- Jan Dick asked if there was a best case scenario as to when this could possibly happen. *Jack responded that there is no good answer to the question, but thinks a study can be done by March 2015. NICTD is an organization with many responsibilities and priorities and he cannot speak on their behalf concerning implementation but this definitely will move things closer to achieving that.*
- Jenny Orsburn questioned if NICTD was currently doing a study now. *Jack responded it is a strategic business plan.* Jenny wondered wouldn't it make sense for NICTD to do this study themselves along with their current study looking at stations and capacity. *Jack clarified the strategic business plan is a study that would be getting into market studies and is a different type of consultant but the two studies are synergistic and is why they want to see the them happen at the same time.*
- Don Parker commented NICTD did a ridership study last year as a lead in to the strategic plan and over half the respondents in that study said they would like to see the option of having bikes on trains.
- Nicole Barker commented that NICTD indicated they are getting a lot of people asking about bicycles.

Mitch opened discussion regarding 3PC Committee representation on the Bikes on Trains Study Advisory Committee. He stated that as Chair of 3PC as well as City of Valparaiso Councilman, Jan Dick would be a good candidate. Jan said he would be glad to help in any way he could; possibly as the Porter County representative or as the representative with alternates. Since the intention was not to have a large Committee it was felt that 3PC did not need representatives from each of the three counties. Vice Chair Bruce Spires felt there should be one and then change if necessary. Bruce then made motion for Jan Dick to be appointed to the Committee. Don Parker seconded the motion and after discussion regarding ideas being submitted from 3PC and adding the 3PC Vice-Chairs as alternates, a vote was taken and with no opposition, the motion passed.

Going forward, the Bikes on Trains Study topic will be a regular agenda item for as long as necessary. Presentation to 3PC will probably part of the project dependent upon consultant availability. It was clarified that anyone may come to the Advisory Committee meetings, but will just not be able to vote.

Paddle –

a. NWI Paddling Association – Update -

Dan Plath provided the group with an update handout. Many exciting things took place in 2013 and there are a lot of great projects and opportunities for 2014. The proposed public paddling schedule for 2014 was included on the handout and includes two new paddles; the Brickie Blueway Paddle which will be on Lake George in Hobart as part of the Hobart Water Festival and the Everglades of the North Paddle which will be held on the Kankakee River at the state line.

b. Camping on the Kank – Update

The 1st year for the LaPorte County campsite finished with lots of success. Paddles used it and kept it clean.

Grab Bag

A. Project Updates:

- Leslie Phemister announced that the 1/8th of a mile 1st piece of the Old Plank Trail extension, which runs under the Route 30 overpass being built in Linwood over the railroad tracks is being paved. Work is being done to have Old Plank Trail stamped on the overpass.
- Mitch is currently in the process of creating an MOU for Sign 'Em Up. Match is still 20%

B. Miscellaneous Issues, Concerns, Gripes

- Gary Evers addressed the new quarterly reporting system through INDOT for communities with federal aid projects. INDOT now requires the reports to be submitted electronically. The reports come to NIRPC and are reviewed by Gary who hopes for Mitch to be brought into the process to review the non-motorized reports. The communities receive two notifications of reports due, one about a month before they are due and again about a week before. Gary requested the communities file early if possible. He also mentioned an MPO Council Meeting discussion regarding a five year federal spending plan and indicated that NIRPC is looked into handling TAP funds the same way.

C. General Announcements (upcoming rides, events, etc.)

- LaPorte will be hosting a new event, Trails and Ales, on September 13, 2014 which will feature a run, mountain bike race and then a brew fest.
- Active Transportation Alliance is putting together an Active Transportation Network which will hold their first meeting on February 25, 2014 at 6:30 p.m. at the Homewood Library.
- Leslie Phemister will be hosting bike rodeo, train the trainer sessions in the Chicagoland region. If anyone in Northwest Indiana has a location at which they are willing to host a session, the training will be free and will take place probably at the end of March or early April.
- Mitch announced that NIRPC has paid to host monthly webinars every third Wednesday at NIRPC from 2:00 – 3:00 pm. As part of the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals (SPBP) Professional Development Series.
- The 2014 Indiana Greenways Awards nominations are now open for the six categories of Outstanding Public Official, Outstanding Trail Advocate, Outstanding Trail Group, Outstanding Corporation, Outstanding Trail Project and Outstanding Local Government. Eligible trails include land, water and equestrian routes.

D. Cornucopia '14 will be held April 24th at the Historic LaPorte Civic Auditorium.

E. Next Meeting is Thursday, February 27, 2014.

Meeting Adjourned.