

NIRPC Plan Excels

2040 Plan Garner's Top National and State Awards

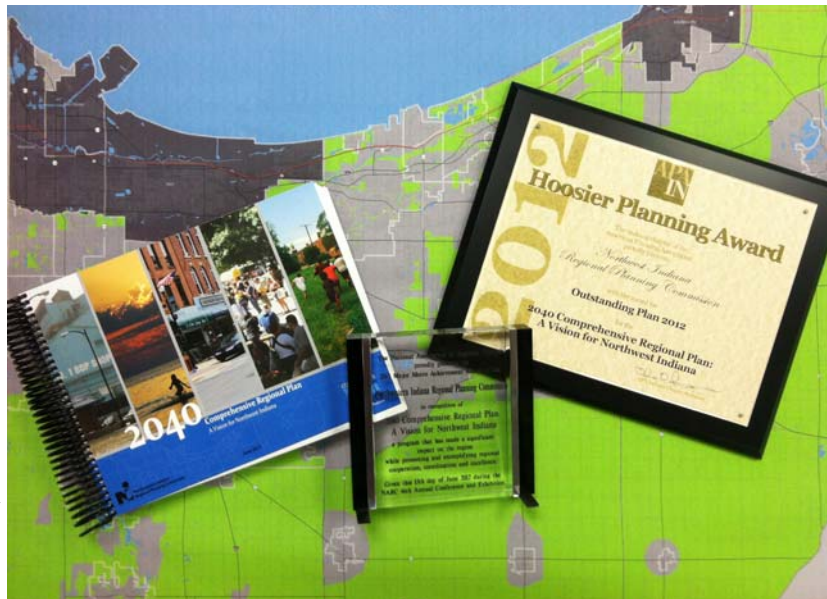
By: Steve Strains

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission's 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP) has received top recognition statewide and nationally by long-time planning advocacy organizations. The CRP was recently

awarded "Plan of the Year" from the Indiana Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-IN); and received the "Outstanding Achievement Award" from the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC).


The APA-IN award came at the organization's Spring Conference in mid-May, which was held at Ball State University in Muncie. The state's annual awards honors excellence in plans, as well as individuals and organizations that have advanced the practice of planning. NIRPC has received six Hoosier Planning Awards from APA-IN in the last nine years.

The NARC award was presented at the organization's annual conference and exhibition in St. Petersburg, FL in mid-June. NIRPC was recognized



as the winner for a mid-sized regional council. It is for "a program that has made a significant impact on the region while promoting and exemplifying regional cooperation, coordination and excellence." It was the third consecutive year, and the fourth time in the last six years

that NIRPC received the highest award in its category from NARC.

The CRP is a vision and guide for creating a vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united region. The plan, which was adopted by the Commission in June, 2011, stresses urban reinvestment, environmental justice, protecting natural resources and integrating transportation with land-use and employment. The CRP is available in multiple formats and can be obtained by calling Mary Thorne at (219) 763-6060, ext. 131. 

Steve Strains is NIRPC's Deputy Director and Director of Planning. He can be reached at sstrains@nirpc.org, or by phone at (219) 763-6060, ext. 130.

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Mayor of Crown Point

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Lake County Commission

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Porter County Commission

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Chesterton Town Council

Executive Board.....**Ken Layton**
LaPorte County Commission

Executive Board.....**Robert Schaefer**
Long Beach Town Council

Executive Board.....**Chester Dobis**
Indiana State Representative

◆————◆
Executive Director.....**John Swanson**
NIRPC
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Requests for alternate formats, please contact Stephen Sostaric at NIRPC at (219) 763-6060 extension 155 or at ssostaric@nirpc.org. Individuals with hearing impairments may contact us through the Indiana Relay 711 service by calling 711 or (800) 743-3333.

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NIRPC's Shafer to Lead National Group



Commissioner Dave Shafer

By: John Swanson

Commissioner Dave Shafer of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) and Clerk-Treasurer for the Town of Munster assumed the position of President of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) at its 46th annual conference in St. Petersburg, Florida on June 13, 2012. Shafer is the first Indiana official to ever hold this national position. NARC is a membership organization comprised of and representing the interests of councils of governments, metropolitan planning organizations and regional councils in the United States.

Commissioner Shafer has represented the Town of Munster on the NIRPC governing board since 1992. He has previously served as the Commission's Chair and served on a number of different standing and special committees and task forces. He currently serves as chair of NIRPC's Legislative Committee and is a member of the Executive Director Search Committee.

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NIRPC Works to Evaluate At-Grade Crossings

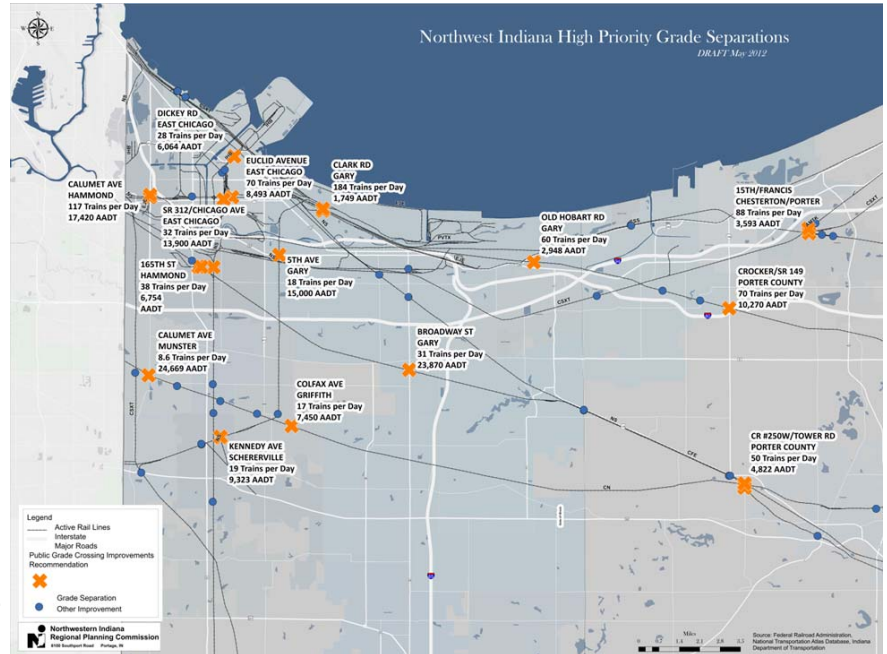
By: Tom Vander Woude

As part of a study now underway, a NIRPC working group is recommending the construction of grade separations in 15 locations to relieve traffic congestion in Northwest Indiana.

To those harried residents and unlikely graffiti experts who have spent countless hours in their idling cars watching trains lumber past, it comes as no surprise to hear that some of the nation's busiest railroads traverse our region, hauling tons of freight and blocking traffic at more than 700 at-grade crossings. Indeed, Northwest Indiana has the highest concentration of at-grade crossing in the State of Indiana, the impacts of which are compounded by the fact that multiple railroads operate in shared corridors and on shared lines, which are concentrated in the most densely populated parts of the region. Some corridors see as many as 184 trains per day.

In 2011, a NIRPC working group, the NWI Rail Velocity, Information, Safety, Improvement and Opportunity Network (VISION) was organized to identify and prioritize problematic at-grade crossings and develop an action plan for grade separations. Participation in this group has included representatives from three Class I railroads, three of the four regional and short line railroads, Indiana Department of Transportation, Indiana Economic Development Corporation, Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority, local municipal governments, Purdue University Calumet and the Indiana High Speed Rail Association.


The NWI Rail VISION working group has recommended the construction of grade separations in 15 locations where high volume roads and high volume rail lines intersect, resulting in traffic congestion, environmental degradation, safety hazards, reduced freight mobility and lost productivity and eco-



nom ic opportunity.

The 15 high priority grade separations were selected from a pool of 80 crossings that were identified through a survey that was distributed to the local governments and railroads of Northwest Indiana. Analysis of traffic volumes, train volumes, and a Federal Railroad Administration accident prediction index and additional stakeholder input refined the list to 15 high priority areas, some with multiple crossings.

Along with its in-house work, NIRPC has developed a partnership with Dr. Robert Rescot of Purdue University Calumet to quantify the traffic delays caused by these crossings. Under Dr. Rescot's supervision, a team of engineering students is conducting an in-depth study of the Canadian National and Indiana Harbor Belt crossings at Huish and East Chicago Ave.

A draft report will be issued in late summer 2012. 

Tom Vander Woude is a Regional Planner at NIRPC. He can be reached at tvanderwoude@nirpc.org, or by phone at (219) 763-6060, ext. 154.

NIRPC Honors Norman Tufford and Chuck Oberlie with New Award

By: John Swanson

At its January 19 and April 19, 2012 meetings, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) recognized former NIRPC Executive Director Norman E. Tufford and former Michigan City Mayor, Charles “Chuck” Oberlie, as the inaugural recipients of the new Norman E. Tufford Award. NIRPC established the Tufford Award in April 2011 to recognize commissioners and staff of the agency who demonstrated outstanding leadership and service to NIRPC and the region.

The first such award was given out posthumously to Tufford, who was the founding Executive Director of NIRPC and served from 1966 until his retirement in 1985. His accomplishments included the establishment of NIRPC’s highly regarded planning program, as well as the formation of the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission, the Kankakee River Development Commission, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District and the Lake Michigan Marina Development Commission. “Norm Tufford was widely recognized for his strong leadership and partnership-building skills and his commitment to improving the quality of life in northwest Indiana,” said John Swanson, NIRPC’s current Executive Director. Mr. Tufford’s son, Jim, accepted the award on behalf of the Tufford family (top photo).

In presenting the award to Mayor Oberlie (bottom photo), NIRPC Chair and Beverly Shores Town Council President Geof Benson cited Oberlie’s

outstanding record of service to the agency during his eight-year term as a NIRPC commissioner. In addition to serving as the Chair of the Commission, Oberlie went on to serve as the Chair of both the Environmental Management Policy Committee and the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan Steering Committee. After the adoption of the 2040 Plan, Oberlie

volunteered to continue to serve on the Pathway to 2040 Implementation Committee in his new role as a private citizen. “It is appropriate that we honor Chuck Oberlie as our first commissioner to receive the award,” commented Benson, “as he recognizes the value NIRPC brings to his municipality and the region. He has made a substantial commitment of his time and leadership skills to the accomplishment of our mission.”

Under the guidelines established for the Tufford Award program, a committee comprised of NIRPC’s chair and executive director and a regional citizen meet each year to determine whether to give out the award to a commissioner and/or staff member who demonstrated outstanding leadership and service to NIRPC and northwest Indiana. In addition to individual plaques, Benson unveiled a master plaque on which engraved name plates for each of the recipients will be mounted. The plaque will be maintained in the lobby of NIRPC’s office.

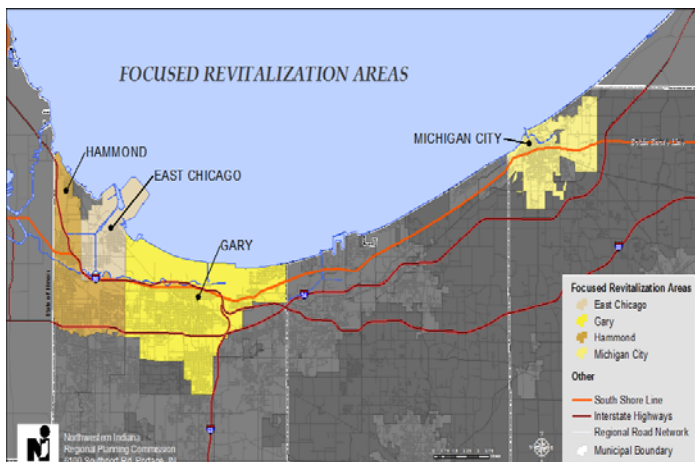
John Swanson is NIRPC’s Executive Director. He can be reached by email at jswanson@nirpc.org, or by phone at 219-763-6060, ext. 101.



By: Hubert Morgan

In something of a departure, this issue's Involve Northwest Indiana column is focusing on a member of NIRPC's staff: Tom Vander Woude. As the point person on staff for the Urban Core Committee, Tom will be playing an important role in the future of NIRPC's public involvement.

HM: What are the Urban Core Communities?



HM: What are we trying to accomplish in the long term by focusing so much on the urban core communities?

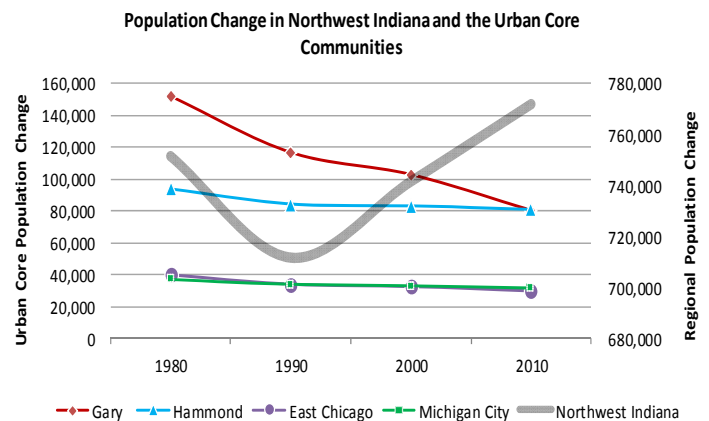
TVW: The vision statement of the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP) calls for a vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united region. For the urban core, there are four principles that underlie the CRP Growth and Revitalization Vision; Support urban reinvestment, ensure environmental justice, protect natural resources and minimize impacts to environmental features and watersheds, and to integrate transportation and land use

HM: What distinguishes the urban core from the rest of NW Indiana?

TVW: The Urban Core cities share a number of characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of Northwest Indiana. Each of these characteristics is not exclusive to any one of the cities and not present to the same degree. Taken as a whole, though, they set the urban core apart. The most prominent characteristics include; Higher than average vacancy rates, continued population losses, concentrations of

low-income and minority populations, significant industrial land, brownfields, Lake Michigan shoreline and access, significant existing infrastructure, major employment centers, and major regional institutions.

HM: It's startling to see the population change that occurred between 1980 and 2010.



HM: When you talk to City Planners in these communities, what are NI RPC's recommendations?

TVW: NIRPC has identified some urban core recommendations within the CRP; there are regional planning projects, local planning projects, data and mapping, brownfield assistance, advocacy, communication between communities, and formulating and disseminating information.

HM: What are the communities' priorities?

TVW: At the next 2040 meeting, we'll release the "Urban Core Priority Report," stay tuned.

HM: When will the report be released and how can people get their hands on it?

TVW: It is still in draft form and in the process of being evaluated, but once available it will be posted on NIRPC's website at <http://www.nirpc.org>.

Hubert Morgan is NIRPC's Public Involvement Coordinator. Email: hmorgan@nirpc.org; Phone: 219-763-6060, ext. 153. Search Involve Northwest Indiana to connect on Facebook.


Meet the Commissioner. . .



Lake County Commissioner Roosevelt Allen, Jr. represents the Lake County Commission on the NIRPC board. He also serves as a member of NIRPC's Executive Board.

A lifelong Gary resident, Commissioner Allen holds degrees from the Worsham College of Mortuary Science, Indiana University, and the DePaul University Graduate School of Business. He is currently co-owner of Guy & Allen Funeral Directors, LLC.

Commissioner Allen is no stranger to public service, having served as a member of the Calumet Township Board for 23 years. For the past six years, he has represented the First District on the Lake County Board of Commissioners. He also serves on several boards and committees for various professional and public entities, including the chairmanship of NWI Health Departments Cooperatives and the Homeland Security First District Oversight Committee.

Commissioner Allen is also a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and a life member of the NAACP. 

NIRPC's Shafer to Lead National Group

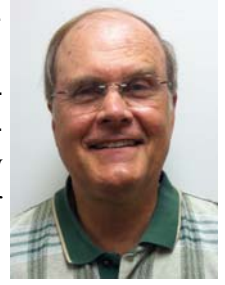
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Shafer was first elected to the NARC Board of Directors in January 2004 to represent the regional councils in the states of Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota and Wisconsin. He was subsequently re-elected to serve two more terms as the regional board member until he was chosen as NARC's President-Elect last year.


In his address to the general membership, Shafer emphasized that NARC must be a strong and effective voice in Washington, D.C. to assure that regional and local government interests are being addressed in federal government legislation and regulations. This is particularly critical when major changes to the Federal authorizations and appropriations for transportation, economic development and environmental programs are being enacted or considered. NARC also must be responsive to the ongoing needs of its members, including training and information sharing, Shafer indicated.

Meet the NIRPC Staff. . .


Steve Strains serves NIRPC as Deputy Director and Director of Planning. Originally from Sheboygan, Wisconsin, he attended Valparaiso University and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. He began his career at NIRPC in 1973, working as an intern on the long-range transportation plan for 1995, which was adopted in 1974.



Today, as Deputy Director, Steve represents the agency in the absence of the Executive Director. As Director of Planning, he managed the planning department staff. His work in these two roles helps keep our regional planning current, relevant, and certified.

Steve has been a resident of Hammond since 1974, where he and his wife have raised two daughters. When NIRPC was located in Highland, this allowed him to bike to work, and he continues to ride Northwest Indiana's regional trail system today. Additionally, Steve has played trumpet in the Highland Town Band for nearly 20 years. Despite living in the region for over 30 years, he has stayed true to his Wisconsin roots and remains a passionate Green Bay Packers fan. 

Geof Benson, the current NIRPC Chair and the Town Council of Beverly Shores, applauded the selection of Shafer to lead NARC, stating "Dave Shafer has had a lengthy and distinguished career as an elected local official and a regional council leader. He has earned not only the respect of his colleagues at NIRPC, but also regional council officials and staff throughout the country. NARC will be extremely well served by Dave's commitment, experience and leadership abilities," Benson said.

At the same general membership meeting, Benson was elected to fill the regional seat vacated by Shafer. "While it's unusual to have two representatives of the same regional council on the NARC Board at one time, the membership is most interested in having board members who will be thoughtful and active participants in the governing process," NIRPC Executive Director John Swanson commented. 

John Swanson is NIRPC's Executive Director. He can be reached by email at jswanson@nirpc.org, or by phone at 219-763-6060, ext. 101.