



The Northern Indiana Coalition of Chambers work together to identify key issues of importance to growing businesses and creating jobs in the Northern Indiana Region.

# One Voice for Northern Indiana

Strategies for Growth in  
Northern Indiana and La Porte  
County. 2015 La Porte Chamber  
Policy Positions





## One Voice for Northern Indiana

The Northern Indiana Coalition of Chambers work together on issues of importance to the Northern Indiana Region. The Six-County coalition has identified these four Regional priorities For the 2015 Legislative session. The document also includes the priority policy issues of the Greater La Porte Chamber of Commerce

**TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE:** Indiana's Transportation funding faces significant challenges for the future. The Indiana General Assembly has not adjusted the excise tax rate on Motor Fuels since the 1990's. Yet the costs associated with building roads has increased dramatically and Major Moves funding has been nearly depleted. The current funding stream cannot meet the needs of Indiana's vital transportation network.

The NICC Region has several critical transportation projects that support economic development in the region. The Indiana General Assembly must find appropriate ways to fund a transportation program that meets the current and future needs of our great state. This issue may be the most critical issue facing our region in the coming decade. NICC members ask the General Assembly to pass legislation in 2015 that supports increased road funding for State and local governments. These changes should include adjusting or modification of revenue streams to meet the needs of highway construction and maintenance necessary to maintain Indiana as the *Crossroads of America*. It should be noted that Hoosiers and visitors are paying significant use-tax on fuel, through the sales tax, that is not returned to the roads. In addition, Northern Indiana has proven toll ways are an effective way to build and maintain vital infrastructure. Toll Ways must be considered in a tool for funding projects throughout the State of Indiana. And existing funds should be used to support the network of existing Indiana roads.

The impacts to the NICC Counties would be reflected by funding critical transportation projects such as:

- Completion of the US 31 project by planning and funding the removal of the remaining stoplights between South Bend and Indianapolis to allow the free flow of traffic between the three improvement projects.
- Upgrade of US 30 to Freeway status. InDOT's preliminary study on this corridor between Valparaiso and Fort Wayne indicate that this upgrade would increase traffic flows from the current 30,000+ vehicles per day to over 80,000 vehicles per day.



- Completion of the CR-17/SR-15 connector from the current point of termination in Elkhart County to a Kosciusko County designated point of connection with SR-15 in Claypool. This corridor has been identified by Conexus as a regional priority.
- Significant improvements along the US-33 corridor between Ft. Wayne and the US-20 by-pass in Elkhart County to ensure continued economic development along this corridor, such as designated passing lanes.
- Construction of the Illiana Expressway into the North Central region with connections to key to key economic development points east of I-65 [i.e., the US-20 bypass in St. Joseph County]. Additionally, studies should be funded to help develop connection points throughout the region.
- Extension of infrastructure (water and sewer) from the City of La Porte, Kingsbury, Westville and Michigan City into the County for economic development. (SE 35 south to Kingsbury, SR 2 west to US 421 south.
- Planning and construct for a new Economic Development Corridor around the City of La Porte (a truck by-pass around the City of La Porte to divert tuck traffic from the downtown) to enhance access to existing economic development sites and more importantly opening access to new and larger sites..
- Allow for full access to Severs Road for local truck traffic to benefit our local business on the east side of La Porte.
- Completion of dual lane design of US 421 from US 30 to I 94.

### **Aviation:**

First. The Office of aviation needs to be strengthened. It is under staffed and ill-equipped to deal with the many challenges facing Indiana, this includes but is not limited to:

- Aviation Planning Assistance
- Airport Development
- Aircraft Counting Program
- Continuous Indiana State Aviation System Planning
- State Airport Grant Administration\Early Coordination of Construction Projects
- Airport Directory
- Aeronautical Chart
- Aviation Awareness

Second. We need to establish dedicated funding for the Office of Aviation and Aviation infrastructure. Presently, there are numerous taxes imposed on aviation activity in the State of Indiana. Sales taxes and Excise taxes compromise the bulk of these. Although these taxes are derived from aviation sources. They are deposited in the State's general fund and



aviation must go hat in hand each biennium to the legislature for an appropriations to support aviation matters. This makes planning difficult for the Office of Aviation.

At one time the Department of Aeronautics was a cabinet level position reporting directly to the Governor, now it has been demoted. We need to restore the prominence of aviation in the State of Indiana, and provide adequate Funding for the Office of Aviation. The Office of Aviation should be reestablished as a cabinet Position reporting directly to the Governor.

**Rail:** The South Shore Railroad is a vital economic development asset to Northern Indiana, La Porte County and St. Joseph County. Upgrades need to be made to the track and electrical operating systems. The time it takes to travel from South Bend to Chicago needs to be reduced. The State must also provide adequate funding for the relocation of the South Shore Rail Road in South Bend and Michigan City.

**EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** The demand for a highly skilled workforce is one of the greatest challenges facing the United States. The changes created by a Global Economy must be addressed by Indiana's educational system. Local education institutions must be empowered to meet the needs of the community they serve. The State of Indiana has a roll in training the future workforce by developing a curriculum designed and funded to meet the current and future need for Indiana employers. Appropriate weight should be given to career education in high school, advanced technical training at technical schools and Ivy Tech, quality degrees from our state colleges and universities to meet the jobs and careers of today and tomorrow. Some of the needs identified to help businesses represented by NICC include:

- An advanced Manufacturing Center on the Elkhart Ivy Tech campus.
- Ensure appropriate funding levels for the K-12 public schools located throughout the region. Any mandates approved by the legislature should include adequate funding to ensure sustainable implementation.
- Ensure that private &/or charter schools receiving public funds adhere to the same regulations and admission requirements as public schools.
- Continue to pursue vocational training opportunities with IVY TECH, local manufacturers and the La Porte Community Scholl Corporation.

**LOCAL FUNDING OPTIONS:** Local communities face a variety of challenges that require the appropriate resources to address. All levels of government should be efficient and lean. However, "one-size fits all" solutions do not address each community's challenges. The unintended consequences of property tax caps and the possibility of elimination of the business



personal property tax continues to have significant impact on many local governments. We believe that the government closest to the people best knows the needs of the people and is best situated to address those needs. Local funding options must be provided to allow each community to address their unique needs. *Specifically:*

- Uncouple the state-mandated use of the local option income taxes by empowering local governments to identify the area of greatest need.
- Grant all Indiana communities the same local revenue producing options currently granted to only a few.
- As options for reducing tax impacts are reviewed [such as Business Personal Property Tax repeal], ensure that State-level replacement revenues are included in the tax relief package.
- Provide more transparency in collection of local income taxes to ensure all revenues return to the County of origin.
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**WATER RESOURCES:** Northern Indiana is an area with abundant surface and groundwater. Water is increasingly becoming an important tool in growth and development of communities. As other areas of Indiana look to outside sources to replace dwindling supplies of water, it is important that State government honors the commitments of the Great Lakes Compact. And for those areas not covered by the Compact, pass legislation that protects the entire State of Indiana from those that would attempt to tap into this important natural resource. Any proposed costs of water projects in water-starved portions of the State should be borne by the users – not the entire State.

### **Local Deposit of local Option Income Tax**

The Chamber supports providing counties an option that would allow employers to deposit local option income tax dollars into a county account versus the state account. LOIT should be uncoupled from the Indiana income tax return. These changes would [provide improved transparency of funds collected and owed to local taxing districts and eliminate the delay of funds to the local communities.

### **Local Government Reform**

- The Chamber supports the concept of local vote centers for La Porte County,
- Election of County Commissioners by District rather than voting at large. Currently the southern part of La Porte County is essentially disenfranchised because of the concentration of population in the Michigan City Area.



- In addition the Chamber recommends that there be three council members elected from each of the three Commissioner Districts for a total of nine Council Members and that the Council continue to be the fiscal body of County Government but also the legislative body for the County, leaving the responsibility of administrative functions for the County to the County Commissioners. (As recommend by Kernan Shepard).