

NICTD West Lake Corridor Project

DEIS Review and Public Hearing Announcement

The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD), as project sponsor to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and in cooperation with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Section 4(f) Evaluation pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to evaluate the West Lake Corridor Project. The Project would construct an approximately 8-mile proposed southern branch extension of NICTD's existing South Shore Line (SSL) between Dyer and Hammond, Indiana. The Project would also operate on about 20 miles of existing SSL and Metra Electric District's line to Millennium Station in downtown Chicago. Alternatives considered include a No Build Alternative and three build alternatives—Commuter Rail, Indiana Harbor Belt, and Hammond—and several design options for the build alternatives in terms of route alignment, station locations, and maintenance and storage facility locations. One of the build alternatives is presented in the DEIS as the NEPA Preferred Alternative.

The Notice of Availability of the DEIS for the proposed West Lake Corridor Project was published in the Federal Register, on Friday, December 16, 2016. Hard copies of the DEIS are available at the following locations:

- Munster Branch of the Lake County Public Library
8701 Calumet Ave, Munster, IN 46321
- Hammond Public Library
564 State St, Hammond, IN 46320
- Dyer-Schererville Branch of the Lake County Public Library
1001 W Lincoln Hwy, Schererville, IN 46375
- NICTD's Administrative Office
33 East U.S. Highway 12, Chesterton, IN 46304

You can also view or download the DEIS from our website: www.nictdwestlake.com. With the publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register, the official 45-day public and agency comment period for the DEIS has begun. You can review and comment on the DEIS until February 3, 2017.

Overview

The DEIS evaluates the environmental, transportation, social, and economic impacts associated with the transportation improvements in the West Lake Corridor study area serving the municipalities of Hammond, Munster and Dyer. The DEIS documents the evaluation of the No Build Alternative, NEPA Preferred and other build alternatives. The No Build Alternative is defined and analyzed to provide the base against which the

NEPA Preferred and other build alternatives can be compared. Final selection of a Preferred Alternative will occur after the DEIS public comment period.

An expansion of the SSL has long been recognized by local residents, stakeholders, municipalities, NICTD, and other agencies as a value to the Northwest Indiana regional community. As early as 1989, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) released a study that identified an extension to the SSL as a potentially viable means to expand mass transit in the region. Since that time, multiple evaluations have occurred. In 2011, NICTD's West Lake Corridor Study concluded that a rail-based service between the Munster/Dyer area and Metra's Millennium Station in downtown Chicago would best meet the public transportation needs of the Study Area. In June 2014, NICTD and the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) released the 20-Year Strategic Business Plan, which highlighted the importance of a West Lake Corridor Project.

The West Lake Corridor Project (Project) would be an approximately 8-mile southern extension of the NICTD existing SSL between Dyer and Hammond, Indiana (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Trains on the new branch line would connect with the existing SSL and ultimately Metra Electric District's (MED) line to the north. The Project would provide new transit service between Dyer, Indiana, and Metra's Millennium Station in downtown Chicago, Illinois, a distance of approximately 29 miles.

The primary purpose of the DEIS is to assist decision-makers and the public in assessing potential impacts associated with the implementation of the Project. This DEIS documents the Project Purpose and Need and presents a discussion of the alternatives considered for implementation. It evaluates, in detail, the potential environmental, transportation, social, and economic impacts associated with the Project, and describes the recommended mitigation measures to offset the unavoidable impacts.

In accordance with federal regulations, full consideration of environmental effects as disclosed during the NEPA process is required before the Project can be advanced to final design, right-of-way (ROW) acquisition occurs, equipment and facilities are procured, or system construction begins.

This DEIS will be made available and circulated for review for 45 days to interested parties, including members of the public, community groups, the business community, elected officials, and public agencies in accordance with federal and state requirements. The project is also being assessed for compliance with the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act. Comments related to Section 106 and Section 4(f) reviews can also be included during the DEIS public comment period.



Figure 1: Regional Setting for West Lake Corridor Project

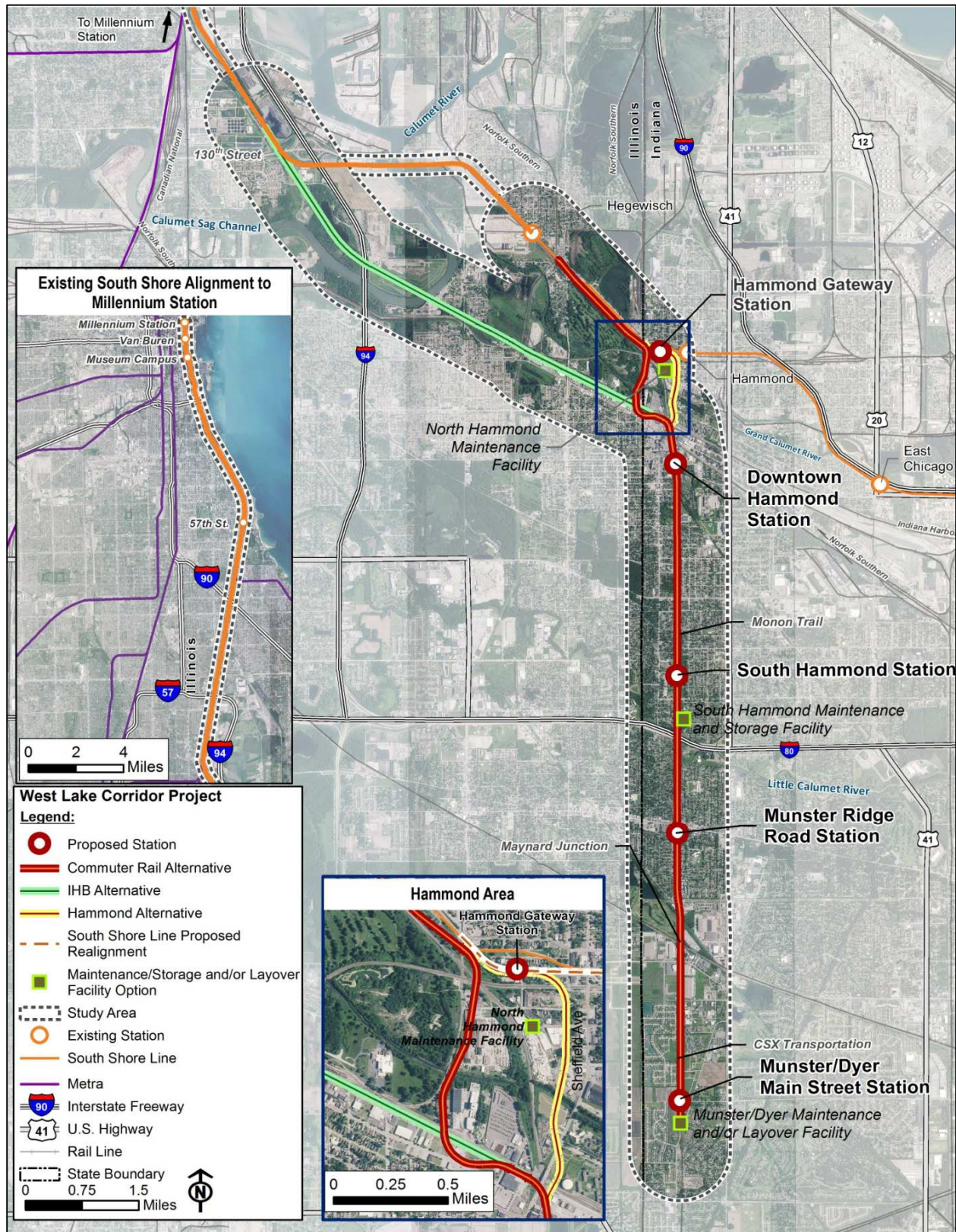


Figure 2: West Lake Corridor Study Area

Public Hearings

NICTD will host three public hearings for the West Lake Corridor Project on the following dates:

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

6:00 - 8:00 PM

Protsman Elementary School,
1121 Harrison Avenue
Dyer, Indiana 46311

Wednesday, January 18, 2017

6:30 - 8:30 PM

Washington Irving Elementary School,
4727 Pine Avenue
Hammond, Indiana 46327

Thursday, January 19, 2017

6:00 - 8:00 PM

Centennial Park
1005 S. Centennial Drive
Munster, Indiana 46321

The purpose of the public hearings is to provide information about the DEIS and solicit comments from the public. All interested parties are invited to review the DEIS and attend the public hearings. The public hearings provide an opportunity for the public to express their views concerning the impacts and mitigation measures identified for the proposed improvements. These hearings will be conducted in an open house format. Comments on the DEIS may be made verbally to a court reporter or in writing during (or after) the public hearings.

Locations of the public hearings are accessible to people with disabilities. If you require an interpreter, including sign language services, or other accommodations at any of the public hearings, please call the West Lake automated comment line at 219-250-2920 and make this request a minimum of 5 days prior to the public hearing date. Para más información en español, visite al website del Proyecto www.nictdwestlake.com.

How to Comment During the 45-Day Public Comment Period

You can comment any of six ways:

1. Make a statement for the record to a court reporter at one of the three public hearings
2. Submit a written comment form at the public hearings
3. Email us at: project.email@nictdwestlake.com
4. Submit a web-based comment form: www.nictdwestlake.com
5. Call the West Lake automated project phone line (219-250-2920)

6. Mail a letter to:
West Lake Corridor Project - DEIS, C/O NICTD
33 East U.S. Highway 12
Chesterton, IN 46304

All methods of commenting will receive equal weight. All comments will be reviewed and considered as part of the development of the combined Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)/Record of Decision (ROD), which is expected in summer 2017. Responses to substantive comments will be included in the combined FEIS/ROD.

Comments on the DEIS must be submitted by February 3, 2017. Information on the project is available at the project website, www.nicdwestlake.com.