

# NICTD West Lake Corridor Project

## WEBSITE FAQs

### Updated: October 30, 2015

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#### **Q1. WHAT IS THE WEST LAKE CORRIDOR PROJECT?**

- A. The West Lake Corridor Project would be an approximate 9-mile southern extension of the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District's (NICTD) existing South Shore Line (SSL) between Dyer and Hammond, Indiana. Trains on the new branch line would connect with the existing SSL and ultimately Metra Electric District's (MED) line to the north. The proposed project would provide new transit service between Dyer, Indiana and Metra's Millennium Station in Downtown Chicago, Illinois, a total distance of approximately 30 miles.

#### **Q2. WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE WEST LAKE CORRIDOR PROJECT?**

- A. An expansion of the South Shore Line has long been recognized 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 a South Shore extension 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 released its *20-Year Strategic Business Plan*, which highlighted the importance of a West Lake Corridor Project. In May 2014, NICTD initiated the environmental review process for the West Lake Corridor Project, a required next step to advance overall project development and secure federal funding.

#### **Q3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND WHAT BENEFITS CAN BE ACHIEVED FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION?**

- A. The purpose of the West Lake Corridor Project is to provide a vital transportation link that connects Northwest Indiana to Chicago and Cook County, Illinois. NICTD is proposing the West Lake Corridor Project as a southern branch extension of the SSL route to reach high-growth areas in Lake County, Indiana. The project would expand NICTD's service coverage, improve mobility and accessibility, and stimulate local job creation and economic development opportunities for Lake County.

The benefits to be achieved from the Project are:

- Serve high-growth areas in central, southern, and western Lake County, Indiana
- Conveniently connect more Northwest Indiana residents to downtown Chicago jobs and major activity centers
- Establish a solid modal alternative between the two metropolitan regions other than driving

- Lower commuting travel times and costs
- Increase NICTD system ridership
- Promote economic development opportunities
- Create local jobs in Northwest Indiana
- Attract and retain families and younger residents
- Provide a valued transportation asset for use by all Northwest Indiana residents.

**Q4. WHAT STUDY IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY?**

- A. The study currently underway involves the environmental review process for the West Lake Corridor Project in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Specifically, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is being prepared for the Project, with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as the Federal Lead Agency and NICTD as the Local Project Sponsor responsible for implementing the Project.

The DEIS will involve a greater level of analysis of the project, including potential design options, ridership, costs, environmental resources, and other considerations than have been conducted to date. This will allow for more informed decisions about such project elements as the transit mode, route alignment, station locations, and other infrastructure improvements. The DEIS will conclude with the selection of a Preferred Alternative (PA).

NICTD would then develop a Financial Plan for the LPA, and submit an application to enter Project Development under FTA's New Starts funding program. These are all necessary steps in order for the project to qualify for potential federal funding in the future.

**Q5. HOW DO THE PUBLIC AND AGENCIES GET INVOLVED?**

- A. The public and agencies are encouraged to comment on the project and participate in the process through various methods, including the project website at [NICTDWestLake.com](http://NICTDWestLake.com). The project website has an online comment section to receive comments and questions, and various project documents will be made available to the public and agencies online.

Public meetings and hearings will also be held, along with individual stakeholder meetings and other meetings upon request. Each meeting will provide the opportunity to receive comments on the project and input into the process. Three rounds of public and agency review are planned during the DEIS phase:

- Scoping Period and Meeting(s):** Scoping is the first step in the environmental review process under NEPA. Scoping is an early and open process for the public and agencies to provide input on the scope, or range, of issues to be addressed and identify the significant issues related to the proposed action. Public and agency scoping meetings were held in fall 2014.
- Public Meeting(s):** The second round of public meeting(s) will be held in fall 2015. These meetings will serve to update the public and agencies on the project and receive input on

project elements such as integrating stations with the surrounding communities. The meetings will be held in a workshop format to maximize public participation.

- c. **Circulation of DEIS and Hearing(s):** The third round of input will involve the circulation of the DEIS in fall 2016. The public and agencies will have the opportunity to provide comments on the DEIS over a 45-day review period, during which time a public hearing(s) will be held to present the findings of the DEIS.

All three rounds of public and agency engagement provide opportunities for input throughout the NEPA environmental review process. The website comment section enables the public to provide ongoing input into the project.

**Q6. WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF TIME EXPECTED TO COMPLETE THIS STUDY AND OVERALL PROJECT?**

- A. Following are the key milestones and schedule for the environmental review process, as well as the overall project:
  - a. **DEIS:** The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be completed in about 2 years, from fall 2014 to fall 2016.
  - b. **FEIS/ROD:** Following the comment period on the DEIS, a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) would be prepared by the FTA and NICTD to complete the environmental review process. The FTA would also issue a Record of Decision (ROD) that states the proposed action, environmental findings, and mitigation requirements. The combined FEIS/ROD would take about 6 months to complete through 2016, depending on the level of comments received on the DEIS.
  - c. **Engineering and Construction:** The environmental review process would then be followed by more detailed design, engineering, and construction from 2016 to 2023.
  - d. **Project Completion:** Service start-up for the NICTD West Lake Corridor Project is targeted for 2023.

This schedule reflects the standard process for NEPA review and FTA's New Starts funding program, but dates are subject to change.