Appendix H1. Guide to the DEIS Response to Comments

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1. Guide to the DEIS Response to Comments

Appendix H contains the comments received on the West Lake Corridor Project (Project) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This DEIS Response to Comments Appendix contains an explanation of the process taken to sort comments received and develop responses. This appendix is organized with the following sections (**Appendix H1** through **Appendix H13**):

1. Guide to the DEIS Response to Comments
2. Index of Agency Comments, Response to Agency Comments
3. Index of Business Comments, Response to Business Comments
4. Index of Civic and Community Organization Comments, Response to Civic and Community Organization Comments
5. Index of General Public Written Comments, Response to General Public Written Comments
6. Index of General Public Verbal Testimony Comments, Response to General Public Verbal Testimony Comments
7. Agency Comments Received on DEIS
8. Business Comments Received on DEIS
9. Civic and Community Organizations Comments Received on DEIS
10. General Written Public Comments Received on DEIS
11. Transcript and alphabetized comment cards – January 17, 2017, Public Hearing – Dyer
12. Transcript and alphabetized comment cards– January 18, 2017, Public Hearing – Hammond
13. Transcript and alphabetized comment cards – January 19, 2017, Public Hearing – Munster

Within the comment period, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) received 464 distinct communications from agencies, Project stakeholders, and the general public on the DEIS. Commenters included 35 groups (consisting of federal and state agencies, freight and commuter rail operators, local businesses, civic and community organizations, etc.), and over 490 individuals. Some individuals commented in more than one format, and some individuals only signed petitions. Names associated with an organization are not listed in the list of individuals unless they commented as an individual as well. Some individuals did not provide a first and/or last name and are listed as "Unknown."

Comments ranged from a few words to letters several pages in length. Longer comments were subdivided into multiple parts, and each part was assigned a unique Comment ID number. Comments were categorized by one or more topics (see **Section 1.3** below) and provided either a unique response or a master response (see **Section 1.5** below for master responses assigned to similar comments).

1.1 Acronyms and Abbreviations

The following acronyms are not spelled out in the response tables:

DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NICTD	Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District

All other acronyms and abbreviations are spelled out the first time used in a response row, but then the acronym could be used thereafter in the response. **Appendix A4** contains a comprehensive list of acronyms and abbreviations.

1.2 DEIS Comment Period

The DEIS 45-day comment period began on December 16, 2016, when notice of the availability of the document was published, and ended on February 3, 2017. Comments were transmitted in several ways including written communications (letters, phone message, online comment card, email communications, and comment cards filled out at public hearings) and by people testifying at public hearings.

All communications received or postmarked by the end of the comment period are included in this appendix. Each communication was assigned a unique identifying number. The communication number is printed in the upper-left-hand corner of each communication. Since many of the received communications included multiple comments, the first task was to identify comments within the communication and, after this was done for all communications, to group comments into categories by topic (e.g., purpose and need, alternatives, noise and vibration, etc.).

1.3 Comments by Topic

Comments were assigned one or more topics. Examples of comments and associated topics include “why is the project needed?” (Purpose and Need topic); “I am concerned about the added traffic parking at the station” (Automobile Traffic); or “how loud is the train?” (Noise/Vibration topic). Many of the comments contained multiple topics. For example, a resident in Munster may have written a letter expressing concern about noise from train operations, impacts to parks and wildlife, and the need for security at the stations. That comment would have been assigned the following four topics: (1) Noise/Vibration, (2) Recreational/Section 4(f) Resources, (3) General Environmental/Ecological Resources, and (4) Safety/Security. This method was used to determine the relative frequency of each topic; the number of occurrences of each topic was divided by the total occurrences (approximately 1,400 assigned topics) to determine the frequency of occurrence for each topic. Topic frequencies ranged from less than 1 percent to 15 percent of the total.

The most common topics (accounting for nearly three-quarters of all the assigned topics) were as follows:

1. Support (15 percent)
2. Oppose (10 percent)
3. Roadway Connectivity to Subdivisions (9 percent)
4. Automobile Traffic (8 percent)
5. Alternatives (7 percent)
6. Property Acquisitions (5 percent)
7. Noise/Vibration (5 percent)
8. Other (5 percent)
9. Funding/Taxes/Referendum (4 percent)
10. Public Involvement/NEPA Process (4 percent)

All topics commented on are listed and described in **Table H1-1**.

Table H1-1: Summary of DEIS Comment Topics

Topic (Frequency)	Examples
Support (15%)	• General support for the Project • Support the Project because it will help commuters save time and money • Support the Project because it will increase job growth and accessibility • Support Hammond Alternative #2
Oppose (10%)	• General opposition to the Project • Oppose the Project for specific reasons (e.g., noise, neighborhood impacts, property acquisition, etc.) • Signed petition from Concerned Families of the West Lake Corridor Project opposing the Project
Roadway Connectivity to Subdivisions (9%)	• Do not support Seminary Drive connector • Do not support Margo Lane connector • Do not support through traffic in subdivisions • Concern with traffic speeds when using connector route • Safety concerns with increased neighborhood traffic • Property values will decrease if roadways connect subdivisions to stations

Topic (Frequency)	Examples
Automobile Traffic (8%)	• Do not support traffic increase • Increase in traffic causes safety concerns • Increase in traffic will disturb the peace • Area will need efficient traffic signals • Residential neighborhoods do not want additional traffic • Margo Lane cannot support increased traffic • Concern for emergency response accessibility • Support for zoning and parking regulations for residential areas • Support additional signage in parking lots to direct traffic and show clear entrances and exits
Alternatives (7%)	• Do not support two stations in Munster • Oppose alternatives that include Ridge Road and Manor Stations • Prefer diesel line from Dyer, Indiana, to Union Station, Chicago, Illinois • Meadows Subdivision prefers East Alternative over Preferred West Alternative • Dyer alternatives are more beneficial than Munster alternatives • The parking lot and relay station should be on the east side of the tracks in Dyer • The parking lot should be on the west side of the tracks in Munster • General opposition to extend through Main Street • Support alternatives through Hammond • Support Hammond housing maintenance facility • Seminary Drive should not be a connector road • Support station and parking lots in Hammond • Prefer all trains stay in Munster or east side of Dyer
Noise/Vibration (5%)	• Support a Quiet Zone at all railroad-highway grade crossings • Additional train horn noise will negatively impact the community • Support a barrier for homes in close proximity to construction location • Project will bring noise-related illnesses to community • General support for reduced neighborhood noise • Concern about additional parking lot noise • Support a barrier being constructed to obstruct noise
Property Acquisitions (5%)	• General displacement concerns • Nursing home acquisition concerns • Residential relocation concerns • Business owner relocation concerns
Other (5%)	• Bidding opportunities • Bridges • Correction to factual information/typographical errors in the DEIS • Comment or question unrelated to this Project

Topic (Frequency)	Examples
Funding/Taxes/Referendum (4%)	• Project is a waste of taxpayer dollars • Project is poorly funded • Oppose general tax increases • Oppose local real estate tax increases • Referendum for the Project is requested • Do not support train investments
Public Involvement/National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Process (4%)	• Commenters did not have the opportunity to speak publicly at meetings • No notice was sent to residents impacted • No information delivered to homeowners • Homeowners treated unfairly during the process
Safety/Security (4%)	• Do not support increased crime rates • Concern for children's safety • Loss of privacy in the neighborhood and home • Safety for the bikers and pedestrians using the bike path • Do not support easier access to Chicago crime • Do not support trains bringing Chicago problems to rural communities
Transit-oriented Development (TOD) (3%)	• Support for TOD around stations • Concern with TOD around stations • Apply TOD to existing stations rather than constructing new stations
Neighborhoods/Quality of Life (3%)	• Project decreases quality of life in Munster and Dyer • Project increases noise, traffic, and crime • Disrupts small-town neighborhood and community • Disruption impacts during construction
Bicycle/Pedestrian (3%)	• Support inclusion of bike lanes near stations and connector streets • Support the bike path remaining stand-alone • Do not support a rail line beside bike path • Project will decrease property values next to bike path when constructing rail line
Purpose and Need (2%)	• General opinion that the Project is not needed • Oppose the construction of new stations when current stations could be upgraded • Concern with low number of riders the Project will gain • Not a significant enough amount of time saved taking the train versus driving • Do not support using outdated technology • Not necessary to have multiple stations in close proximity
Aesthetics/Visual (2%)	• Do not support view of trains from property • Do not support view of parking lot from property • Do not support barriers built to block noise • Budget should include trees and landscaping

Topic (Frequency)	Examples
Property Values (2%)	• Concern that property values will decrease • Eminent domain concern • Request support selling homes once property value has decreased • Request compensation for impacted residents
Water Resources (2%)	• Support construction of stormwater pond • Do not support destroying additional wetlands • Request additional study for wetland mitigation • Concern with location of the municipal water supply source • Concern with stormwater drains handling increased capacity • Concern with flooding issues in the community • Concern for runoff routes if bike path is paved over
General Environmental/ Ecological Resources (2%)	• Support converting old Hammond station into a low-growing native prairie • Concern with wildlife displacement • Concern with tree and foliage mitigation • Support additional green space corridor in South Hammond
Freight Traffic (1%)	• Support sufficient capacity • Support the need for a maintenance facility south of Dyer's Crossing • Reject the Maynard Junction Rail Profile Option • Support additional study on Kensington Crossing • Railroad-highway grade crossings will create significant delays
Socioeconomics (1%)	• Project will result in minimal economic growth • Project does not support the cities that will be affected • Community greatly impacted post-construction
Air Quality (1%)	• Project adds pollution from increased trains/vehicles • Project adds pollution near schools • Concerned for residents with respiratory problems • Community will have negative health benefits • Concerned with increased carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels
Hazardous Materials (1%)	• Do not support destroying farm buildings containing asbestos • Do not support construction stirring up polluted sediments
Cultural/Section 6(f)/ Section 106 Resources (1%)	• Tribes request consultation if any archaeological evidence is discovered • Support incorporating the existing barns at Ridge Road Station into the platform design • Request documentation for the Historic American Building Survey before demolition
Roadway (1%)	• Current infrastructure cannot support increased traffic at Ridge Road • Project will create unsafe conditions at intersections • Dyer needs road improvements before seeing increased traffic • Support widening U.S. 30 (Sheffield and Columbia) • Concern connecting and extending to Main Street

Topic (Frequency)	Examples
Recreational/Section 4(f) Resources (1%)	• Request project reduce severity of impacts and minimize harm • Support Recreational Trails Program • Support relocating or replacing any portions of the bike trail impacted during construction
South Shore Line (<1%)	• Poor performance in winter weather • Request better accommodations (wi-fi, restrooms) • Frequent delays decrease ridership • Support improving existing service
Utilities (<1%)	• Awareness of the constraints and requirements needed to protect the environment • Awareness of immediate sediment impacts and installation of an engineered cap near West Branch River • Concern one alternative is over a former manufactured gas plant site in Hammond • Concern with utility relocation
Environmental Justice (<1%)	• Project is disadvantageous to lower-income communities outside the corridor • Project is in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (<1%)	• Support additional handicap parking spots • Support disabled access on platforms
None (<1%)	• Blank comments

1.4 How to Find a Response to a Comment

Comments and corresponding responses can be found in the tables following this guide to **Appendix H**. Each comment response table is preceded by an index in which the commenters are listed in alphabetical order along with corresponding comment identification numbers.

Comments submitted by organizations are listed alphabetically by organization name. The tables of comments and corresponding responses are organized as follows:

- Comment ID Number: A unique comment identification number assigned to each comment
- Organization
- Commenter's Last Name
- Commenter's First Name
- Comment Type: comment card, online comment card, email, letter, phone message, petition, verbal testimony (court reporter), etc.
- Topic: as described in **Section 1.3**
- Comment
- Response

Comments from agencies and their corresponding responses are grouped alphabetically by organization, as follows:

- Amtrak
- Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railroad
- City of Hammond
- CN (Canadian National) Railroad
- Consolidated Rail Corporation
- Dyer Fire Department
- Dyer Town Council
- Hammond Historic Preservation Commission
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources (INDNR) – Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology
- Forest County Potawatomi Community
- Metra
- Miami Tribe of Oklahoma
- NiSource
- Norfolk Southern Corporation
- Town of Munster
- U.S. Coast Guard, Ninth Coast Guard District
- U.S. Department of the Interior
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

Comments from businesses and their corresponding responses are grouped alphabetically by organization, as follows:

- Alliance Coatings, LLC
- Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage
- Do Good Productions
- Northwest Indiana Area Health Center
- Robinson Engineering, Ltd.

Comments from civic and community organizations and their corresponding responses are grouped alphabetically by organization. Petitions are grouped together with the prefix Petition followed by the organization name or petition title if no organization was listed. Names on the petition are listed alphabetically by last name per each submitted petition. Comments from civic and community organizations are grouped as follows:

- Alliance for Regional Development
- Brunswick/Hanover Association
- Cedar Lake Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors
- Munster Historical Society
- One Region
- Petition – Against the NEPA Preferred Plan (14 signatures)
- Petition – Concerned Families of the West Lake Corridor Project (32 signatures)
- Petition – Meadow Lake Condo Association (98 signatures)
- Petition – Save the Green Corridor in South Hammond, Indiana (115 signatures)
- Sierra Club
- South Shore Trails

Comments from the general public and their corresponding responses are presented in two summary tables: one table for comments received in writing and through phone message, and one table for comments received as verbal testimony during public hearings through a court reporter. An index is provided for each of the comment and response tables (see the following sections of this appendix). Each index and comment table is grouped alphabetically by the last name of the commenter and their corresponding comment identification number(s) to make finding specific individuals' comment(s) easier. When searching for a specific comment or commenter, locate the name of the individual in each index, then look for the comment identification number in the general public comments and responses tables.

All comments received on the DEIS have been documented and responded to in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and copies of all original comments are located in **Appendices H7** through **H13**.

1.5 Master Responses to Similar Comments

Many comments were similar in nature, and master responses were prepared to these comments. This appendix groups similar and recurring comments into 33 common master response themes, as shown in **Table H1-2**. Following the table, each general comment is described further and is followed by a master response. The master response numbers are referenced by number, where applicable, in each of the responses to individual public and agency comments. If an individual comment is not addressed by one of the general comments and responses, a specific response is provided for that comment. The numbering of themed comments does not denote the number of comments that were received regarding that theme.

Table H1-2. Master Response Summary

Number	General Comment and Master Response Theme
1	Disabled access/ADA compliance
2	Aesthetics and visual resources
3	Air quality
4	Location of the Preferred Alternative
5	Amtrak alternative
6	Double-track alternative
7	Alternatives to commuter rail, such as roads
8	Alternative station locations
9	Existing bicycle and pedestrian trails
10	Bicycle lanes at stations
11	Bicycle and pedestrian safety, fencing, and barriers
12	Green space and tree preservation
13	Funding and taxes
14	Wetland impacts
15	Neighborhood impacts and quality of life
16	Public involvement process
17	Request for referendum
18	Noise and vibration impacts and Quiet Zones
19	General opposition to the Project
20	Property acquisition, eminent domain, and estimated timeline for home appraisals and acquisitions
21	Property values
22	Project purpose and need
23	Crime near stations
24	General safety and security
25	Erie Lackawanna Trail
26	General support for the Project
27	Transit-oriented development
28	Access and street connectivity
29	Traffic congestion in the vicinity of proposed stations
30	Floodplains and floodways
31	Traffic and connections to subdivisions
32	Affordable, low-income, and Section 8 housing
33	Ridership estimates

1.5.1 Master Response 1: Disabled Access/Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance

General Comment 1: Some commenters had concerns about disabled access and/or compliance with ADA standards at stations and platforms.

Master Response 1: In compliance with ADA standards, the design of the FEIS Preferred Alternative (Hammond Alternative Option 2) includes access for people with disabilities at all stations and platforms. For example, stations would include ADA parking and a public address system with both speakers and signs to convey information to people with disabilities in compliance with ADA requirements. All platforms would be accessible by ADA-compliant ramps and would include tactile warning strips at their edges. All platforms would be ADA-compliant for boarding and exiting the train. Pedestrian tunnels would also be designed to be compliant and would provide safe, accessible crossing of the tracks. Any new crosswalk ramps and grades for new sidewalks would comply with ADA regulations including pushbuttons and pedestrian signal heads.

1.5.2 Master Response 2: Aesthetics and Visual Resources

General Comment 2: Project facilities located in neighborhoods would affect the aesthetics of the neighborhoods.

Master Response 2: NICTD would construct facilities that fit within the context of the local environment and would engage local jurisdictions and stakeholders regarding landscaping around stations and along the Project corridor to maintain or improve the visual character of the area. **Section 4.7** of the FEIS discusses the visual environment in the Project Area and the mitigation proposed. Operational effects on the visual environment would be minimized or mitigated through high-quality design and construction of the Project. NICTD would coordinate with the local jurisdictions and responsible agencies to create visual design guidelines for the Project, such as selection of landscape treatments that would be consistent with applicable local policies and compatible with the character of the affected community. Design specifications for parking lots would also include visual screening, which would be determined through ongoing coordination with the affected municipalities. The Project would also minimize vegetation disturbances and clearing of trees and brush during construction, as NICTD is aware of the value the community places on trees and natural landscapes, and would minimize the impact to the tree canopy wherever possible.

1.5.3 Master Response 3: Air Quality

General Comment 3: Some commenters had concerns about air quality from either increased traffic along major roads and within the Project Area or from the trains themselves, thus negatively affecting public health.

Master Response 3: **Section 5.4** of the FEIS concluded that air pollutant emissions with the FEIS Preferred Alternative would be slightly lower than those with the No Build Alternative due to the additional riders that would take advantage of the new rail service, and thus remove those vehicles from the roads. In addition, current USEPA regulations and standards for vehicle engines and fuels are expected to cause overall emissions from motor vehicles to decline substantially over the next several decades. Parking lots associated with stations could result in temporary slightly elevated air pollutant concentrations, particularly during the morning and evening commute periods when a number of vehicles attempt to enter or leave a parking lot simultaneously. However, given the substantial improvements in motor vehicle emission

standards, these slightly elevated air pollutant concentrations would not result in pollutant "hot spots" and are not projected to exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) at any location within the Project Area.

Additionally, the overall regional impact of air pollutant emissions would be reduced as a result of this Project. As stated in the FEIS, the trains would be electric-powered. While diesel maintenance and inspection equipment would infrequently run on the tracks, the impacts would not be substantial. The FEIS showed that air quality impacts from parking lots at stations would also not be substantial. USEPA acknowledged and agreed with these findings in its comment letter on the DEIS.

The potential air quality impacts during construction would be associated primarily with dust and vehicle exhaust emissions. Elevated air pollutant emissions and ambient air pollutant concentrations could adversely affect highly sensitive groups such as the elderly and those with asthma or other respiratory illnesses; however, mitigation measures for air pollutant emissions would be incorporated into the Project construction plan and implemented as discussed below.

To reduce adverse air quality impacts during construction, NICTD would direct the contractor to prepare and implement a *Dust Control Plan*; maximize the use of newer or retrofit diesel-powered equipment and vehicles with emission-control devices; use ultra-low-sulfur diesel to control diesel particulate emissions; and develop a plan to help construction trucks access and exit the construction sites and staging areas to minimize congestion (and related emission) impacts on local traffic. NICTD would require the contractor to identify nearby homes, daycare facilities, schools, and playgrounds within 300 feet of construction sites at stations and parking lots, and implement dust suppression or other measures to help ensure that visible dust emissions are not leaving the construction site and affecting such sensitive receptors. The greenhouse gas emissions during construction would also be minimized by limiting truck and equipment idling times, maintaining equipment in proper working order, and encouraging carpooling and providing transit passes for construction workers.

Ozone and PM_{10} (respirable particulate matter) are the NAAQS nonattainment or maintenance pollutants in the Project Area affected by conformity requirements. The northern portion of the Project corridor is in NAAQS maintenance status. Because the Project is included in the applicable long-range transportation plan and the Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) 2018–2021 Transportation Improvement Program, the Project would be in conformance with transportation conformity requirements for ozone as required by 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 93, Subpart A.

1.5.4 Master Response 4: Location of the Preferred Alternative

General Comment 4: The FEIS Preferred Alternative should be designed to avoid developed neighborhoods.

Master Response 4: The FEIS Preferred Alternative is consistent with and supports the transportation goals and objectives of the Project. The FEIS Preferred Alternative would improve the transportation system by providing people in the Project Area with more travel choices and faster travel times between residential areas, major destinations, and employment centers. Through the environmental and preliminary design process, NICTD selected the FEIS Preferred Alternative because it best met the project purpose and need; however, several design changes have been made since the publication of the DEIS to address public concerns and minimize impacts to the Project Area. NICTD will continue to work with community stakeholders to mitigate impacts to existing neighborhoods. The location of the FEIS Preferred

Alternative is a result of many years of study to meet the needs of the Project while balancing impacts on the surrounding community.

The alternatives development process built on several prior studies and the West Lake Corridor DEIS. These studies examined a broad range of alignments, technologies, and transit modes in the Project Area. The concept of providing more-direct access to transit in central, southern, and western Lake County has been considered for more than 25 years in several regional transportation studies. In 2011, NICTD's West Lake Corridor Study (NICTD 2011) 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 northwest Indiana.

The Project Area is within and surrounding the Monon Railroad corridor. The Monon Railroad corridor was jointly acquired in 1993 by the City of Hammond, the Town of Munster, and NICTD for the purposes of extending the South Shore Line (SSL) and implementing a multimodal corridor. Moreover, The *Town of Dyer Comprehensive Plan* (Town of Dyer 2012) states that "transportation planning now needs to anticipate commuter rail" and indicates that the land use effects of commuter rail service would be advantageous to Dyer. *A Vision for the 21st Century: 2010 Comprehensive Plan* (Town of Munster 2010, revised 2012) outlines the catalytic effects of future transit service in its downtown area. The *City of Hammond Comprehensive/Land Use Pla*n (City of Hammond 1992, reprinted in 2013) recommends the Project as one initiative to support its goal of improving transportation in Hammond. *The 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan: A Vision for Northwest Indiana* (NIRPC 2011) focuses on a key strategy—the Livable Communities Initiative. This initiative aims to focus growth on community-based transportation and land use development and redevelopment projects that bring vitality to downtown areas, neighborhoods, station areas, commercial cores, and transit corridors. NIRPC has identified four neighborhood livable centers near the proposed Project stations including Downtown Hammond, South Hammond, Munster Ridge Road, and Munster/Dyer Main Street Stations. Consistency with land use plans is further discussed in **Section 4.2** of the FEIS and in the *Land Use, Neighborhoods, and Community Resources Technical Report* (Appendix H2 of the DEIS).

1.5.5 Master Response 5: Amtrak Alternative

General Comment 5: Has any consideration been given to the potential for Amtrak's Hoosier State and Cardinal Trains to move their train stop from the current Amtrak Dyer station to the proposed West Lake Project Munster/Dyer Main Street Station? What is the possibility of future connectivity between Amtrak and the proposed West Lake Corridor Project?

Master Response 5: NICTD investigated the possibility of a cross-platform transfer point at Munster/Dyer Main Street Station in collaboration with Amtrak. As stated in Section 2.2.2.2 of the DEIS, during the second screening of alternatives, station locations were evaluated. The DEIS recommended four baseline station sites and three optional station locations that met basic evaluation criteria but were close to baseline sites. A Dyer Amtrak station was listed as an optional location. After further conceptual development and refinement of the alternatives after the second screening, the Dyer Amtrak location was not selected, and the DEIS concluded that the Project would be entirely separated physically and operationally from freight and Amtrak services on the CSX Transportation (CSX) Monon Subdivision freight line.

Co-locating Amtrak with the West Lake service would be adding another service line onto a limited corridor and is not consistent with Amtrak's current operational and existing physical locations or requirements. The Project corridor would solely be owned by NICTD and would require an extensive Amtrak service agreement. Co-locating service would introduce potentially different levels of signals with a regional carrier operating different rail cars (diesel, not electric)

and would not be consistent with the purpose of and need for the Project. **Chapter 10** of the FEIS provides further explanation of the evaluation of alternatives.

Section 3.2.3 of the FEIS states that the Project would not affect the current service provided by Amtrak nor preclude future Amtrak service use. Although the Project and Amtrak would serve similar origin and destination points, the frequency and timing of Amtrak services are different than those of the proposed new service, so they would serve different markets. The Project service is designed to serve the work commute market, while the limited Amtrak schedules are designed to serve the infrequent intercity-travel market.

1.5.6 Master Response 6: Double-track Alternative

General Comment 6: The West Lake Corridor Project should consider the use of a double track instead of a single track.

Master Response 6: NICTD would consider double tracking in the future if ridership demand warrants it. Double track is ideal; however, it is not feasible for the narrow right-of-way (ROW) available in the Project Area or for the cost of the 9 miles of track. The guideway design accommodates one train, and, where two trains traveling in opposite directions are scheduled to meet in a particular location, a siding is proposed. The FEIS Preferred Alternative would operate in a dedicated guideway within new or existing ROW. The guideway would include a single track throughout, with one 2,000-foot-long siding track near the center of the proposed alignment north of Interstate 80/94 (I-80/94) and a 1,900-foot-long siding track at Munster/Dyer Main Street Station.

As shown in **Table 2.4-1** in **Section 2.4.1** of the FEIS, NICTD is planning a separate Double-Track Northwest Indiana Project to add a second track between Gary, Indiana, and the Porter County–LaPorte County border. The Double-Track Northwest Indiana Project is one of the projects included in the FEIS No Build Alternative. The No Build Alternative reflects existing and committed improvements to the regional transit network for the planning horizon year of 2040 minus the West Lake Corridor Project.

1.5.7 Master Response 7: Alternatives to Commuter Rail, Such as Roads

General Comment 7: Other transportation alternatives should be invested in rather than transit (for example, roads).

Master Response 7: A number of studies have been conducted to develop, evaluate, and refine a range of transportation alternatives within the Project Area and included extensive coordination with stakeholders and members of the public. In 1989, the NIRPC West Lake County Transportation Corridor Study examined ways to improve travel between areas of Lake County and downtown Chicago, including upgrades to existing roadway facilities, exclusive bus ways, light rail, and commuter rail. The study concluded that commuter rail would have the lowest capital costs and the highest ridership and would be the best long-term option for improving mobility and spurring economic development. This conclusion led to the joint decision in 1993 by NICTD, the Town of Munster, and the City of Hammond to purchase the abandoned Monon Railroad corridor for commuter rail. **Chapter 1** of the FEIS details these studies and the purpose of and need for the Project. **Section 1.2.2** of the FEIS gives more details regarding the transportation options and the effects of population growth on the existing roadway and transit systems.

1.5.8 Master Response 8: Alternative Station Locations

General Comment 8: The Project should consider different station or other Project component location(s) such as parking lots.

Master Response 8: **Chapter 2** of the FEIS explains the two-step analysis and evaluation process that NICTD used to identify and screen a wide range of possible alignments and design options that could meet the purpose of and need for the Project while minimizing impacts and accommodating the demand for service. In the first step of the analysis, NICTD narrowed the range of alternatives from 19 alternatives to 3 alternatives, which were advanced to the second stage of screening. The second step involved an assessment of the three alternatives as well as Project elements such as station locations. Thirteen station sites were evaluated in the second screening, with four baseline station locations recommended to be further studied in the FEIS. **Chapter 10** of the FEIS further explains the evaluation of the alternatives. The station locations were coordinated with the affected municipalities, including the Towns of Munster and Dyer and the City of Hammond. Changes to station locations are identified in **Section 2.4.2** of the FEIS. The intent of the placement and design of the stations is to enhance the community and maximize access to the stations.

Since the publication of the DEIS, the following changes have been made to the station locations as a result of public comments received.

1. The layover facility is no longer proposed at Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, but instead would be located adjacent to the Hammond maintenance and storage facility (MSF) at Hammond Gateway Station.
2. The platform at South Hammond Station has been moved farther south toward 173rd Street, and the parking has been split so that parking lots would be located both north and south of 173rd Street.
3. The platform at Munster Ridge Road Station and associated parking would be moved north of Ridge Road, rather than the initial location to the south.
4. The southwest corner of Main Street at Sheridan Road would include ADA-compliant parking, a “Kiss-and-Ride” facility, stormwater detention, and a power substation instead of the previously proposed layover facility. As stated in item 1 above, the layover facility has been moved to Hammond Gateway Station.

1.5.9 Master Response 9: Existing Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails

General Comment 9: The Project should maintain or relocate existing trails, including the walking path in Munster.

Master Response 9: The existing trail network would remain after the Project is completed. However, some of the existing informal/unauthorized footpaths would be permanently closed. As detailed in **Section 3.4** and **Chapter 7** of the FEIS, the FEIS Preferred Alternative would affect the Monon Trail, the Little Calumet River Trail, and the Pennsy Greenway during construction of the Project. The FEIS Preferred Alternative would overlay approximately 5,000 feet of the Monon Trail between Fisher Street in Munster and Douglas Street in Hammond. The current trail would be relocated adjacent to the Project track in several sections to accommodate the Project track and overhead contact system infrastructure. This would include relocating the Monon Trail pedestrian bridge over the Little Calumet River in Munster so that the Project can retain use of the original railroad track bed. The relocation would require a minor modification of the junction of the Monon Trail with the Little Calumet River Trail by

moving it east. This modification is not considered a significant impact since the Little Calumet River Trail is not formally considered a public trail (see **Section 7.4.3** of the FEIS).The Monon Trail would also be relocated adjacent to the Project track at Munster Ridge Road Station in Munster and Douglas Street in Hammond (see **Section 7.4.2.1** of the FEIS).The Project would include a separated crossing of the Pennsy Greenway and a relocation of 350 feet of the Pennsy Path between Manor Avenue and the Monon Trail. The relocation would direct trail users to the new railroad-highway grade crossing at Fisher Street.

Fences would be provided to prohibit pedestrians and cyclists from crossing the track where east-to-west pedestrian or bicycling facilities do not exist or where NICTD deems them to be important from a safety perspective. All railroad-highway grade crossings would include east-to-west pedestrian access to maintain the existing continuity of the sidewalk network.

Improvements at the proposed stations would include a multiuse path access proposed from Seminary Drive in the Meadows subdivision and Margo Lane in the West Lakes subdivision to Munster/Dyer Main Street Station. Also at Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, a pedestrian bridge would be provided over the station driveway to provide safe access between the southern parking area and the station, plus a pedestrian underpass under the CSX freight line and the Project tracks would provide safe access between the western parking area and the station. Details regarding the pedestrian and bicycle facilities at the proposed stations are included in **Section 3.4** of the FEIS.

1.5.10 Master Response 10: Bicycle Lanes at Stations

General Comment 10: The Project should install bicycle lanes around the stations.

Master Response 10: NICTD is designing stations to be as bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly as possible and would work with local communities to include them in the development of compatible infrastructure for accessing the stations. Installation of bicycle lanes on adjoining streets would be outside the Project's scope, and it would be in the jurisdiction of the local communities to add bicycle lanes near the stations.

Each station would include station platforms, parking facilities, benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, and other site furnishings. Shelter buildings would be located at Munster/Dyer Main Street and Hammond Gateway Stations only. **Section 3.6.4** of the FEIS provides **Figures 3.6-3** through **3.6-6** that show the proposed stations.

At South Hammond Station, a crosswalk would be provided across 173rd Street for pedestrians.

At Hammond Gateway Station, access to the SSL platform (north of the Project track) from the parking lot would be accommodated by a paved plaza area under the elevated Project track above. Sidewalks and crosswalks would be provided along Chicago Street to provide access to the stations.

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities were also incorporated into a separate project, the West Lake TOD study. For proposed station areas, the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) and NICTD, in coordination with the Towns of Dyer and Munster and the City of Hammond, have completed an FTA-funded pilot program for TOD planning. Through this program, NICTD, RDA, and the communities examined ways to improve economic development and ridership, foster multimodal connectivity and accessibility, improve transit access for pedestrians and bicyclists, engage the private sector, identify infrastructure needs, and enable and encourage mixed-use development near the Project stations. The West Lake TOD study was completed in September 2017 and is included in **Appendix F** of the FEIS.

1.5.11 Master Response 11: Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety, Fencing and Barriers

General Comment 11: Some commenters were concerned about bicycle and pedestrian safety at track crossings and requested the use of fencing or other barriers.

Master Response 11: Safety would be a key design consideration. Fences, in combination with other barrier methods, would be provided to prohibit pedestrians and cyclists from crossing the track where east-to-west pedestrian or bicycling facilities do not exist or where NICTD deems them to be important from a safety perspective. All railroad-highway grade crossings would include east-to-west pedestrian access to maintain the existing continuity of the sidewalk network.

Railroad-highway grade crossings require warning devices. Warning devices can be passive (for example, stop signs) or active (for example, automatic gates). All Project railroad-highway grade crossings would include pedestrian gates, regardless of the type of existing stop control (stop signs, traffic signal, etc.). The Federal Highway Administration's *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (FHWA 2009a) specifies the timing of the downward motion of gate arms, conditions for how long the gate arms must be down, and the timing for the gate arms to return to an upright position.

1.5.12 Master Response 12: Green Space and Tree Preservation

General Comment 12: The Project should avoid impacts on green space and preserve as many trees as possible in the Project corridor.

Master Response 12: As discussed in **Section 7.5** of the FEIS, the FEIS Preferred Alternative would not require any ROW from West Lakes Park, Harrison Park, Erie Lackawanna Trail, or the Dan Rabin Plaza. FTA has made a determination of *de minimis* impact for the proposed crossover of the original Pennsy Greenway corridor and the adjustment of the Fisher Street crossing at the existing path which includes NICTD's commitment to temporarily close the path during Project construction. NICTD also proposed to relocate approximately 0.95 mile (5,000 feet) of the Monon Trail within the existing ROW connecting the Hammond and Munster sections on a relocated trail bridge at the Little Calumet River. Temporary closure of the parts of the Monon Trail to be relocated would occur during Project construction.

Operational effects on the visual environment would be minimized or mitigated through high-quality design and construction of the Project. NICTD would coordinate with the local jurisdictions and responsible agencies to create visual design guidelines for the Project, such as through the selection of landscape treatments that would be consistent with applicable local policies and compatible with the character of the affected community. The Project would minimize vegetation disturbances and clearing of trees and brush during construction. NICTD is aware of the value the community places on trees and natural landscapes and would minimize impacts on the tree canopy wherever possible. NICTD, in coordination with the City of Hammond and the Towns of Munster and Dyer, is also committed to maintaining the existing trails within the Project Area and would limit trail relocation to sections of trail where relocation is required for safety. Refer to **Section 4.7** of the FEIS for more information on visual resources.

1.5.13 Master Response 13: Funding and Taxes

General Comment 13: Some commenters were concerned about how the Project would be funded and what tax impacts local residents could experience.

Master Response 13: **Chapter 11** has been added to the FEIS to summarize the financial considerations for the FEIS Preferred Alternative. The Project would not require new taxes on local residents. The capital cost estimate for the FEIS Preferred Alternative is $661.0 million (in year-of-expenditure dollars). If the project is awarded an FTA Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) as anticipated, the federal government would contribute up to a percentage agreed upon pursuant to the terms of the FFGA. The remaining percentage would be provided by the State of Indiana and RDA. The State of Indiana has committed $6 million per year in state revenues for 30 years to the Project, for a total of $180 million. RDA has committed RDA general revenues and has secured commitments from 16 local governments to contribute $4.5 million per year in local income tax revenues for 30 years to the Project.

1.5.14 Master Response 14: Wetland Impacts

General Comment 14: Some commenters were concerned about wetland impacts.

Master Response 14: **Section 5.7** of the FEIS discusses wetlands. NICTD's preliminary review indicated that the DEIS NEPA Preferred Alternative would fill about 8.2 acres of low- to moderate-quality wetlands. The FEIS Preferred Alternative has reduced this impact to 3.43 acres. A determination of impacts to waters of the U.S. and isolated wetlands would be finalized during the Engineering phase of the Project. The amount and type of compensatory mitigation needed would be determined as part of the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permitting process in compliance with federal and state requirements. For impacts to wetlands determined not to be jurisdictional under the CWA, mitigation would be provided in accordance with applicable state requirements. Riparian mitigation would be required under Indiana's Construction in a Floodway regulations. Impacts specific to riparian habitat would be determined as part of the CWA Section 404 permitting process. Mitigation measures are identified in **Section 5.7.5** of the FEIS. As the Project design is advanced to 100 percent, opportunities to avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands would be evaluated.

1.5.15 Master Response 15: Neighborhood Impacts and Quality of Life

General Comment 15: Project facilities located in a neighborhood would affect the quality of the neighborhood.

Master Response 15: The Project would improve the transportation system in the Project Area and the region by providing residents with more travel choices and faster travel times between residential areas, major destinations, and employment centers. The station locations in the DEIS NEPA Preferred Alternative were reviewed and refined to minimize disruption to surrounding neighborhoods and maximize access to the stations. Changes to station locations are described in **Section 2.4.2** of the FEIS. As described more fully in **Section 4.5.4** of the FEIS, the FEIS Preferred Alternative would have adverse effects on multiple neighborhoods along the rail alignment. These impacts would result from noise and vibration, parking, property acquisition, and traffic effects on neighborhoods and community resources, all of which would be mitigated as described in **Section 4.5.5** of the FEIS.

Also, the FEIS Preferred Alternative would displace several residents and businesses, which would affect neighborhoods and communities. Moreover, surface parking lots developed at proposed stations could disrupt neighborhood cohesion. Displaced residents and businesses

would be relocated in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act, thereby minimizing the effect on those displaced. However, NICTD would continue to coordinate with affected communities to identify strategies to minimize the effects on the neighborhoods.

As described in the DEIS and in **Section 4.2.4** of the FEIS, the Project is generally consistent with and supports the following land use plans: *Town of Dyer Comprehensive Plan* (Dyer 2012); *A Vision for the 21st Century: 2010 Comprehensive Plan* (Munster 2010); *City of Hammond Comprehensive Land Use Plan* (Hammond 1992, reprinted in 2013); *Calumet City Comprehensive Plan* (Teska Associates, Inc., Barron Chisholm, Inc., and Business Districts, Inc. 2014); *State Wabash & Michigan Plan* (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning [CMAP] 2000); *Central Area Plan* (CMAP 2003); *Reconnecting Neighborhoods Plan* (CMAP 2009); *A Plan for Economic Growth and Jobs* (CMAP 2012); *PARTNERING FOR PROSPERITY, An Economic Growth Action Agenda for Cook County* (Cook County 2013); *GO TO 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* (CMAP 2014c); and *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan, A Vision for Northwest Indiana (Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission* [NIRPC] 2011).

1.5.16 Master Response 16: Public Involvement Process

General Comment 16: Some commenters were concerned with the lack of an appropriate public involvement process.

Master Response 16: In coordination with FTA, NICTD has developed and implemented a comprehensive agency coordination and public involvement program as part of the NEPA process. The program has included conducting public meetings and open houses, meeting with community organizations, establishing a Project website (http://www.nictdwestlake.com/), maintaining a database of stakeholders, developing written materials including postcards that were sent to 16,384 residences and businesses in the Project Area, distributing flyers at SSL stations, and issuing press releases.

FTA issued the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Federal Register on September 30, 2014. Within the Notice of Intent, FTA provided information on how the public could participate in and comment on the Project. The Notice of Intent also provided information on scoping meetings, including date, time, and location. A scoping meeting was held on October 28, 2014, in Munster. In addition, public workshops were conducted by NICTD on November 9, 2015, in Dyer; November 10, 2015, in Hammond; and November 11, 2015, in Munster. Public hearings on the DEIS were held January 16–18, 2017, in Munster, Hammond, and Dyer.

Local, regional, and federal agency coordination has been ongoing throughout the environmental review process for the development of the EIS. FTA and NICTD performed agency coordination to achieve an open exchange of information, ideas, and concerns throughout the environmental review process and to avoid or minimize potential impacts on the natural and human environments. The following locally represented agencies are considered cooperating agencies for the EIS process:

- National Park Service
- USEPA
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- INDNR
- Chicago Department of Transportation
- CMAP
- CTA
- Metra
- Regional Transportation Authority
- RDA
- NIRPC
- City of Hammond
- Cook County
- Town of Dyer
- Town of Munster

Agency coordination and public participation is discussed in **Chapter 9** of the FEIS. **Chapter 9** of the FEIS documents public and agency comments received on the DEIS.

Please check the Project website (http://www.nictdwestlake.com/) for updates, which are prepared periodically as new and updated information is available. The website will be continually updated as the Project advances. Please refer to **Table 9.7-1** in the FEIS for a comprehensive list of outreach activities conducted since the publication of the DEIS.

1.5.17 Master Response 17: Request for Referendum

General Comment 17: Some commenters asked why there was no referendum or requested a referendum.

Master Response 17: Upon review of Indiana state law referring to a referendum being placed on a ballot for vote, the action is not required nor anticipated for this Project. The Indiana Election Division has published a list of actions that can trigger a referendum in the state of Indiana (http://www.in.gov/sos/elections/files/2014_Referendum_Brochure.pdf). The list of actions that could trigger a referendum does not include transportation projects. The law also states that, if an item is not on the list of statutorily approved referendum topics, no referendum can be called for a vote. Consequently, it would be an unusual circumstance to call a referendum for the West Lake Corridor Project.

During the EIS process, FTA and NICTD performed technical analyses as required for the NEPA process. Input provided by the public and relevant agencies was a critical element in the decision-making process. NICTD has considered public input during alternatives development (as described in **Section 2.3** of the FEIS) and has worked to address concerns through alignment and infrastructure refinements to avoid or minimize negative effects and provide local benefits (as described in **Section 2.4** of the FEIS). FTA and NICTD continue to work with federal, state, and local agencies to address issues related to design to avoid or minimize and mitigate negative impacts to the extent reasonably feasible. **Chapter 9** of the FEIS describes the comprehensive agency coordination and public involvement program conducted by FTA and NICTD for the duration of the Project.

1.5.18 Master Response 18: Noise and Vibration Impacts and Quiet Zones

General Comment 18: Some commenters had concerns regarding increases in ambient noise and vibration in neighborhoods and the use of Quiet Zones.

Master Response 18: **Section 5.2** of the FEIS discusses the updated noise impacts from, and potential mitigation measures for, the FEIS Preferred Alternative. Existing noise levels were measured at many locations throughout the Project Area. Noise from traffic on major local roads, among other sources, influence measurements of existing noise in the Project Area. Noise impacts from Project improvements were determined, in part, based on existing noise levels. The noise assessment incorporated many different elements of the Project including the electric trains, track elements, elevated structures, crossing bells, maintenance facilities, "Park-and-Ride" lots, and construction.

Train horns were not included in this assessment because Quiet Zones would be implemented at all railroad-highway grade crossings along the new alignment. A Quiet Zone is a Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)approved section of a rail line where trains do not sound their horns. Public roadway crossings of a Quiet Zone must have certain safety measures in place, which include gates, warning devices, and in some cases other supplemental safety measures such as concrete medians. Grade crossing treatments are also governed by the roadway authority, such as the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), Lake County, or the local municipality. Per the FRA requirements, local agencies must apply for Quiet Zones. NICTD would work with municipalities and FRA to coordinate the applications for Quiet Zones. Four-quadrant gates were included in the design of the Project to meet Quiet Zone safety measure requirements.

The noise assessment determined that the "Park-and-Ride" lots would generate noise about 2 decibels (dB) higher than the existing noise level. A 3 dB-change in sound level is widely considered to be barely noticeable in outdoor environments, and a 10-dB change in sound level is perceived as a doubling (or halving) of the loudness. For reference, two identical noise sources added together result in an increase of 3 dBA (e.g., 55 dBA + 55 dBA = 58 dBA).

Section 5.2.5 of the FEIS discusses noise mitigation measures including noise barriers, receiver-based treatments, and noise performance specifications that would be implemented during construction.

Section 5.3 of the FEIS discusses the updated vibration impacts and potential mitigation measures. Construction activities that typically generate the most severe vibrations with the potential for building damage include blasting and pile-driving. No blasting activities are expected to be included on this Project, and pile-driving is expected to occur in limited locations. Examples of other construction activities with a potential for vibration impact include concrete pavement breaking, vibratory compaction, and drilling or excavating in the ground near sensitive structures. During the Final Design and Construction phases of the Project, NICTD would require construction contractors to develop a construction vibration management plan.

1.5.19 Master Response 19: General Opposition to the Project

General Comment 19: Some commenters expressed opposition to the Project.

Master Response 19: NICTD and FTA reviewed all comments submitted during the comment period. NEPA and the Indiana Environmental Policy Act require FTA and NICTD to respond to substantive comments related to the content of the DEIS but not to questions or comments limited to public policy decisions (for example, general statements of support or opposition). However, before identifying the FEIS Preferred Alternative, NICTD and FTA received a

comment summary report with a copy of all comments submitted. This appendix (**Appendix H** of the FEIS) includes copies of all the comments and the responses to them.

Existing transportation options available to residents in the Project Area (defined as 0.5 mile on either side of the proposed alignments) seeking access to Chicago jobs are limited to travel by automobile, or by automobile to the Metra Electric District (MED) electric line and SSL commuter rail services. Forecasted population growth in the Project Area would exert increasing demands on regional roads, MED, and the SSL, which are already operating at or near capacity (Policy Analytics, LLC 2014). Thus, there is a need to increase transit options for Project Area residents to access downtown Chicago. **Section 1.2** of the FEIS details the purpose of and need for the Project.

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, NIRPC released a study that identified an extension to the SSL as a potentially viable means to expand mass transit in the region (NIRPC 1989). 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 Project Area (NICTD 2011). In June 2014, NICTD and RDA released the *20-Year Strategic Business Plan*, which highlighted the importance of a West Lake Corridor Project (NICTD and RDA 2014).

Scoping for the Project was held in an open-house format on October 28, 2014, to solicit comments from the public and agencies invited to participate in the environmental review process. In addition to the scoping meetings, public workshops were also held. During these meetings, NICTD described the study objectives and solicited input on the purpose and need, alternatives considered, and environmental issues being studied for the Project. The input FTA and NICTD received during scoping helped to identify the appropriate alternatives and the depth and breadth of environmental analysis to be completed. **Section 2.3** of the FEIS discusses the process followed to select the Locally Preferred Alternative.

1.5.20 Master Response 20: Property Acquisition, Eminent Domain, and Estimated Timeline for Home Appraisals and Acquisitions

General Comment 20: Some commenters had concerns and/or questions about property acquisition, the use of eminent domain, and the estimated timeline for home appraisals and acquisitions.

Master Response 20: **Tables 4.3-1** and **4.3-2** in the FEIS list the total full and partial acquisitions estimated as a result of the FEIS Preferred Alternative. The Project design has not yet been finalized; therefore, property needs could change as the design develops, particularly as NICTD seeks to minimize impacts. Federal and state regulations and laws govern the acquisition of private property for public use and define when acquisition would be required. Property acquisition cannot begin until the FEIS is complete and the Record of Decision (ROD) is issued by FTA. If the Project is successful in achieving its NEPA clearance, the FEIS/ROD is expected in March 2018. If FTA approves the FEIS/ROD and other required FTA New Starts documentation requirements, FTA would grant NICTD the authority to advance the Project into the final engineering phase in mid-2018. Acquisition activities would then take place throughout 2018 and early 2019.

As discussed in **Section 4.3.5** of the FEIS, after NICTD decides to acquire a property, the acquisition process would generally be as follows:

- NICTD would contact the real property owner or owner's representative in order to explain the acquisition process, including the right to accompany the appraiser during inspection of the property, and would provide the owner with a written notice of NICTD's intent to acquire the property.
- NICTD would provide the owner with a written offer of the approved estimate of just compensation for the real property to be acquired and a summary statement of the basis for the offer.
- NICTD would give the property owner an opportunity to consider the offer for at least 30 days.
- NICTD would conduct negotiations without any attempt to coerce the property owner into reaching an agreement.
- NICTD would provide the property owner or tenant with at least 90 days' written notice to vacate the property before NICTD takes possession.

If negotiations with property owners are not successful, NICTD may acquire the property through eminent domain. If eminent domain is necessary, NICTD would follow the procedures set forth under state laws including Indiana Eminent Domain (Indiana Code § 32-24) and Relocation Assistance (Indiana Code § 8-23-17). In addition, the Hammond City Council has passed the "Hammond is My Home" ordinance (Ordinance 9539) to provide Hammond homeowners who would be displaced by the Project with a $5,000 grant for closing costs if they purchase a replacement primary residence in Hammond. For information about the Hammond is My Home ordinance, contact the City of Hammond or view the ordinance at Hammond's website (http://www.gohammond.com/wp-content/uploads/Departments/City_Clerk/Recently_Adopted_Ordinances/2016/9359_30_percent_gaming_funds_for_neighborhoods_ammendment.pdf).

1.5.21 Master Response 21: Property Values

General Comment 21: Some commenters were concerned about a decrease in property values as a result of the Project.

Master Response 21: Property values are affected by many factors including a variety of market conditions. Research has shown that major transit investments such as commuter rail generally yield positive effects on property values. There is potential for an increase in property values in the areas surrounding proposed commuter rail stations, as commuter rail access can increase the convenience and desirability of nearby residential, commercial, and office properties. Commuter rail transit can also contribute to existing market forces that can increase the potential for TOD or redevelopment. Development and redevelopment are managed by the local jurisdictions in the Project Area and are driven predominantly by regional and local economic conditions and land uses as defined in locally adopted comprehensive plans and zoning laws. Transit projects, including commuter rail lines, can advance the timing and increase the intensity of development, especially in areas near proposed stations, as allowed by local comprehensive plans. The direct impacts of a rail project on property values are difficult to assess conclusively because there are so many other factors that also affect property values. Continuing population growth and a strengthening of the local economy within the Project Area would also contribute to redevelopment and increased property values. **Chapter 6** of the FEIS

discusses the secondary and cumulative effects of the Project on socioeconomics and economic development, including property values.

1.5.22 Master Response 22: Project Purpose and Need

General Comment 22: Some commenters said that the need for the Project is not strong.

Master Response 22: Multiple studies have identified the need for transportation improvements in the Project Area. The Project is needed to increase transportation options for accessing downtown Chicago, reduce travel time to downtown Chicago, reduce the parking burden at existing transit stations, reduce travel costs, and promote economic development. The FEIS Preferred Alternative is consistent with and supports the transportation goals and objectives of the Project. The FEIS Preferred Alternative would improve the transportation system by providing residents with more travel choices and faster travel times between residential areas, major destinations, and employment centers. The FEIS Preferred Alternative is within the former Monon Railroad corridor, which was jointly acquired in 1993 by the City of Hammond, the Town of Munster, and NICTD for the purposes of extending the SSL and implementing a multimodal corridor. Refer to **Section 1.2** of the FEIS for a full description of the purpose of and need for the Project. Some examples of the need for the Project are provided below.

- **Increase Transportation Options for Accessing Downtown Chicago.** Existing transportation options available to residents in the Project Area seeking access to jobs in Chicago are limited to travel by automobile or travel by automobile to the MED electric line, owned and operated by Metra, and SSL commuter rail services. The population growth anticipated in the Project Area would exert increasing demands on regional roads. Metra's services, including the MED and the SSL, are already operating at or near capacity (Policy Analytics, LLC 2014). Thus, the Project purpose to increase transportation options is supported by the lack of direct transit service to downtown Chicago from parts of the Project Area experiencing high growth rates.
- **Reduce Travel Time to Downtown Chicago.** The purpose of reducing travel time for residents in the Project Area is supported by the need to provide service that has competitive travel times with the congested roadway system connecting northwest Indiana to downtown Chicago. In addition, the purpose would be met by reducing travel time to commuter rail stations and parking facilities with available capacity. The addition of more traffic from population growth to an already congested network would cause even more congestion by further slowing throughput. Offloading some commuters from highways to commuter rail would improve the efficiency of the highway system.
- **Reduce Travel Costs.** The Project purpose of reducing the cost of travel to downtown Chicago is supported by the need to offer alternatives to the high cost of driving to downtown Chicago. This need is primarily driven by the cost to park in downtown Chicago. Providing transit alternatives in the Project Area at a lower cost would minimize the burden of being more distant to jobs while still allowing residents in the Project Area to take advantage of comparatively lower area housing costs.
- **Promote Economic Development.** Previously completed studies emphasized the addition of new transit service as a critical means for achieving a long-term vision for the growth of businesses and jobs within the Project Area, citing transit-oriented, mixed-use redevelopment; town center plans; walkable communities; and attracting young families and workers as specific goals. The advancement of a commuter rail project consistent with these visions is a common thread uniting entities responsible for making land use decisions and promoting economic development within the Project Area.

1.5.23 Master Response 23: Crime near Stations

General Comment 23: Some commenters were concerned that crime would increase in the neighborhoods surrounding stations.

Master Response 23: NICTD would implement a *Safety and Emergency Preparedness Plan* (SEPP). The primary purpose of the plan is to consider safety and security, operational staff training, and emergency response measures. The SEPP specifies actions and requirements of the NICTD Police to maintain safety and security during Project construction and operations. Applicable safety and security precautions would be specified in the *Safety and Security Management Plan* (SSMP) and SEPP and would be overseen by NICTD in cooperation with local law enforcement and emergency response personnel. Pedestrian safety in station areas would be enhanced through improved intersections and crosswalks in key locations.

The SSMP and SEPP would outline applicable safety and security precautions at the Hammond MSF, traction power substation facilities, stations, parking lots, and neighborhoods and while riding the train. To reduce potential risks in station areas, potential mitigation measures would include security cameras and adequate lighting along pedestrian sidewalks and "Park-and-Ride" lots. In addition, NICTD would work closely with municipal police services to implement measures to deter loitering and criminal activity. Overall, based on previous studies detailed in **Section 4.8.4** of the FEIS and NICTD's current experience with the SSL, it appears that new train stations associated with the FEIS Preferred Alternative would be unlikely to have much, if any, impact on neighborhood crime. As more people walk, bike, and use public transit in areas with compact and mixed development, activity in the station areas would increase and deter crime. NICTD's Police Department would develop strong cooperative relationships with local law enforcement agencies throughout the Project Area to implement patrols.

1.5.24 Master Response 24: General Safety and Security

General Comment 24: Some commenters were concerned with the general safety of local residents as well as the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians at crossings.

Master Response 24: **Section 4.8** of the FEIS addresses safety and security. Adherence to NICTD design guidelines and the presence of security personnel would result in no adverse impacts related to safety and security. Safety for rail users, area residents, local pedestrians and bicyclists, Project construction workers, operators, and vehicle occupants is an important consideration for the Project. The framework for ensuring the highest level of safety to these groups would be established through conformance with the Project *Site Safety and Health Plan*, *Construction Contingency Plan*, NICTD's SSMP, and NICTD's SEPP. Project operations in conformance with these plans would be closely and continuously coordinated with local area law enforcement, medical, fire, transportation, and other organizations with related emergency responsibilities within the Project Area. All railroad-highway grade crossings for vehicles and pedestrians would include safety improvements such as warning and control devices including raised median barriers and four-quadrant gates. In addition, fencing to prohibit pedestrians and cyclists from crossing the track where east-west pedestrian or cycling facilities do not exist would be provided where deemed necessary by NICTD from a safety perspective.

1.5.25 Master Response 25: Erie Lackawanna Trail

General Comment 25: Some commenters were concerned with the use of the Erie Lackawanna Trail.

Master Response 25: As discussed in Section 8.5.2 of the DEIS, NICTD previously proposed to acquire ROW from Hammond's Erie Lackawanna Trail property and to shift the paved trail on the trail's land for a distance of about 0.06 mile (320 feet) between Sibley Street and Fayette Street. This would form a new terminus at the north and connect to the remaining portion of the trail to the south. **Section 8.5.3** of the FEIS explains that, in order to avoid impacts on the Erie Lackawanna Trail, NICTD made design changes in the FEIS Preferred Alternative. The Project alignment was revised, and retaining walls were added. Because of these changes, the trail would have adequate horizontal and vertical separation distance between the rail and the trail alignments, and the Project would no longer require any relocation of the Erie Lackawanna Trail. The West Lake Corridor Project and NICTD would comply with all applicable federal laws, regulations, and requirements regarding Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) properties.

1.5.26 Master Response 26: General Support for the Project

General Comment 26: Some commenters expressed support for the Project.

Master Response 26: NICTD and FTA reviewed all comments submitted during the comment period. NEPA and the Indiana Environmental Policy Act require FTA and NICTD to respond to substantive comments related to the content of the DEIS but not to questions or comments limited to public policy decisions (for example, general statements of support or opposition). However, before identifying the FEIS Preferred Alternative, NICTD and FTA received a comment summary report with a copy of all comments submitted. This appendix (**Appendix H** of the FEIS) includes copies of all the comments and the responses to them. 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, NIRPC released a study that identified an extension to the SSL as a potentially viable means to expand mass transit in the region (NIRPC 1989). 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 Project Area (NICTD 2011). In June 2014, NICTD and RDA released the *20-Year Strategic Business Plan*, which highlighted the importance of a West Lake Corridor Project (NICTD and RDA 2014).

Scoping for the Project was held in an open-house format on October 28, 2014, to solicit comments from the public and agencies invited to participate in the environmental review process. In addition to the scoping meetings, public workshops were also held. During these meetings, NICTD described the study objectives and solicited input on the purpose and need, alternatives considered, and environmental issues being studied for the Project. The input FTA and NICTD received during scoping helped to identify the appropriate alternatives and the depth and breadth of environmental analysis to be completed. **Section 2.3** of the FEIS discusses the process followed to select the Locally Preferred Alternative.

1.5.27 Master Response 27: Transit-oriented Development

General Comment 27: Several comments were received regarding either support for or concerns with TOD in the Project Area.

Master Response 27: TOD is a type of land use or community development intended to encourage the use of transit. Measures used in areas with TOD designations include increased densities, clustered development, pedestrian amenities, parking restrictions, and urban design enhancements. TOD typically includes a mix of housing, office, retail, and/or other commercial development and amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a half-mile of accessible, affordable, enjoyable, and reliable public transportation.

The West Lake Corridor Project is a 9-mile southern extension of the NICTD existing SSL between Dyer and Hammond, Indiana. The West Lake TOD Project was a separate planning process conducted by RDA in cooperation with the City of Hammond and Towns of Munster and Dyer. The West Lake TOD Project planning process created TOD plans for areas around four new stations that are proposed as part of the West Lake Corridor Project. Individual plans for each station areas would be created. The four new stations are Hammond Gateway, South Hammond, Munster Ridge Road, and Munster/Dyer Main Street. The West Lake TOD Project was completed in September 2017 and is included in **Appendix F** of the FEIS.

Although both the West Lake Corridor Project EIS and West Lake TOD Plans contribute to the overall commuter rail project, they are separate processes with different deliverables. The EIS process sets boundaries for a project on which that federal grant money can be used. The TOD Plans would be cognizant of the boundaries, and any development that is proposed to be federally funded would be placed within that boundary.

NICTD encourages residents to participate in both the West Lake Corridor Project and the West Lake TOD planning processes to express ideas and issues related to the commuter rail extension and development around station areas. More information is available at www.nictdwestlake.com/ and westlaketod.civicpage.com/.

1.5.28 Master Response 28: Access and Street Connectivity

General Comment 28: The Project would negatively affect access, such as street connectivity to businesses and free-flowing access for emergency response vehicles.

Master Response 28: As discussed in **Section 3.5** of the FEIS, the FEIS Preferred Alternative would require some permanent road closures in Hammond, which are shown in the Project plan view drawings in **Appendix E** of the FEIS. The following streets would be affected.

The existing railroad-highway grade crossing of Russell Street between Lyman and Oakley Avenues would be closed. This closure would require modifying Russell Street to accommodate two-way traffic between Hohman and Lyman Avenues. At Lyman Avenue, Russell Street would curve and align to Lyman Avenue. East of the FEIS Preferred Alternative, Russell Street would become a cul-de-sac to continue providing access to properties between the proposed track and Oakley Avenue. **Figure 3.4-2** in the FEIS shows the changes to Russell Street.

North of Grand Calumet River, much of the land between the FEIS Preferred Alternative's connection with the SSL near the state line and the Grand Calumet River is proposed to be redeveloped for Hammond Gateway Station and the Hammond MSF. See **Figure 3.6-6** in the FEIS that shows Hammond Gateway Station. Wabash Avenue would remain open between the CSX freight line and Marble Street. Hanover Street (west of Sheffield Avenue) and Marble Street (between Wabash and Sheffield Avenues) would be permanently closed. A new street

would be constructed west of Sheffield Avenue to connect to Wabash Avenue (shown as Allman Street on the conceptual engineering plans in **Appendix E** of the FEIS), which would provide access to the remaining segment of Marble Street, the Hammond MSF, and industrial properties west of the Norfolk Southern Railway line. Even though the roads would be removed, access would be maintained to facilities west of Sheffield Avenue by the construction of Allman Street. See **Figure 3.5-4** in the FEIS for street closures.

Work zone traffic-control plans would be prepared and approved by the appropriate agency during the Design and Construction phases of the Project. These plans would be coordinated with the City of Hammond, the Town of Munster, the Town of Dyer, Lake County, emergency services, and INDOT. The plans would identify requirements for maintaining access to businesses and medical and emergency facilities.

Section 4.8.4 of the FEIS discusses that emergency service vehicles would be able to access construction sites at all times in the same way contractors access the sites, and detours would be needed at times because of road closures. Road closures would be planned in advance and coordinated with local municipalities, which would provide notification of upcoming closures and detours to the police and fire departments. NICTD anticipates that emergency vehicle access would still be available through certain active construction areas even if public access has been restricted. The overall impact of construction on emergency service access or response times would be minimal.

1.5.29 Master Response 29: Traffic Congestion in the Vicinity of Proposed Stations

General Comment 29: Some commenters had concerns about traffic congestion in the vicinity of the proposed stations.

Master Response 29: Intersection traffic analyses have been conducted in the vicinity of all proposed stations. The vicinity includes the proposed station access and adjacent intersections. The DEIS discussed the intersections studied in Section 3.5.2. For the FEIS, additional intersections were added based on the travel routes to and from the proposed stations, as discussed in **Section 3.5.2** of the FEIS. The analyses identified less-than-desirable operations at the following intersections: 173rd Street and Harrison Avenue, Sheffield Avenue and the Lot 1 driveway south of Main Street, and Hohman Avenue and Chicago Street. **Section 3.5.5** of the FEIS includes recommendations to obtain operations similar to existing conditions. The mitigation strategies for the intersections that would be affected near each station are described below.

- As the Project design advances, NICTD would coordinate with agencies having jurisdiction and/or maintenance responsibility for affected roads and with emergency services and school districts regarding railroad-highway grade crossings and changes to the roadway network connectivity.
- Signalized intersections located within 200 feet of the railroad-highway grade crossings would be upgraded to include traffic signal interconnect with the rail warning system.
- Existing traffic signal at Sheffield Avenue and Main Street in Munster and Dyer would be upgraded to accommodate the parking lot driveway as a fourth leg to the intersection.
- The intersection of 173rd Street and Harrison Avenue would be striped to include an eastbound-to-southbound right-turn lane, which would help the intersection operate at an

acceptable level of service. Sufficient roadway width exists to make this change without widening the intersection.

- The roundabout being built by the City of Hammond at Holman Avenue and Chicago Street would be monitored for traffic operations, and coordination between the City of Hammond and NICTD would occur regarding cost sharing if an improvement to the roundabout is warranted.

Project trains would be no longer than eight cars and would be designed to fit at the station platforms without blocking any roads. Warning devices may be required to stay activated at railroad-highway grade crossings while boarding and alighting when the train is in the southbound direction only. When a train is moving toward the crossroad, gates would be down until the train passes the crossroad. All stations are located north of the nearest crossroad, so when a train is in the station loading and traveling in the southbound direction, the crossroad gates would stay activated while trains are in the station.

The commuter traffic peak does not occur at the same time as the roadway or adjacent land use peaks. Minor traffic conflicts are anticipated. Although delays up to 83 seconds could occur (the total time a railroad-highway grade crossing is blocked per train crossing), the occurrence of delay is twice during the morning peak hour and once during the afternoon peak hour. Signalized intersections located within 200 feet of the railroad-highway grade crossings would be upgraded to include traffic signal interconnect with the rail warning system.

1.5.30 Master Response 30: Floodplains and Floodways

General Comment 30: Some commenters had concerns regarding the potential for increased flooding.

Master Response 30: Both the State of Indiana and the State of Illinois have floodplain and floodway regulations designed to minimize the potential for increased flooding. In Indiana, construction activities require a permit from INDNR; in Illinois, permits are required from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. In both Indiana and Illinois, compensatory storage is required for fill in the floodway.

Soils that can be seasonally wet, are poorly drained, make up steep slopes, or are more prone to erosion and flooding were considered since these areas can become unstable as foundations for transportation infrastructure (see Section 5.6.2.1 of the DEIS). The DEIS NEPA Preferred Alternative would have a total fill area of 1.17 acres in the floodway and 1.47 acres in the Grand Calumet River floodplain. The FEIS Preferred Alternative would have no impacts on floodways or floodplains (see **Section 5.7** of the FEIS). The FEIS Preferred Alternative would create approximately 48.4 acres of additional impervious area; however, NICTD would work with the local municipalities to properly design drainage related to the Project. Excess stormwater runoff volumes generated by the Project, compared to existing condition runoff volumes, would meet detention requirements as outlined in the manuals of the municipality within which the drainage area is located.

1.5.31 Master Response 31: Traffic and Connections to Subdivisions

General Comment 31: One of the most common objections to the DEIS NEPA Preferred Alternative raised by residents was the proposal to connect subdivisions and station parking lots with local roads, specifically connecting Margo Lane in the West Lakes subdivision and Seminary Drive in the Meadows subdivision to the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station parking lot to the west of the Project tracks.

Master Response 31: Since the publication of the DEIS, changes have been made to the station plans; these changes are identified in **Section 2.4.2** of the FEIS. The Munster/Dyer layover facility has been relocated adjacent to the Hammond MSF at Hammond Gateway Station. The southwest corner of Main Street at Sheridan Road at Munster/Dyer Main Street Station now includes ADA-compliant parking, a "Kiss-and-Ride" facility, stormwater detention, and a power substation instead of the previously proposed layover facility. Also included in the changes were modifications to the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station parking lot west of the Project tracks. Margo Lane in the West Lakes subdivision and Seminary Drive in the Meadows subdivision would not connect to the parking lot. Residents north and south of the proposed Munster/Dyer Main Street Station requested that vehicular access to the parking lot not be provided via Seminary Drive in the Meadows subdivision or Mango Lane in the West Lakes subdivision. The residents felt that pedestrian access would be sufficient for these subdivisions, and, by not providing a vehicular connection, through traffic would not use their neighborhoods. Vehicular access to the parking lot would be from the station driveway at the Sheffield Avenue and Main Street intersection only. See **Figure 3.6-3** in the FEIS for a station layout.

1.5.32 Master Response 32: Affordable, Low-income, and Section 8 Housing

General Comment 32: Some commenters were opposed to or concerned with the amount and/or location of housing labeled as affordable, low-income, or Section 8.

Master Response 32: The type of housing permitted in a community is determined through land use and zoning decisions made by the local planning commission. For this reason, the type of housing permitted in the towns of Munster and Dyer and the city of Hammond would be determined by their respective planning commissions. NICTD would continue to work with the local municipalities and has provided any additional or new information in the FEIS.

1.5.33 Master Response 33: Ridership Estimates

General Comment 33: Some commenters had questions about how future ridership projections are made.

Master Response 33: **Section 3.2.2** of the FEIS explains the methodology used to calculate future average weekday ridership (**Table 3.2-1** in the FEIS). NICTD uses a travel forecasting model developed by FTA to determine ridership levels, referred to as the Simplified Trips-On-Project Software, or STOPS. This model considers population and employment growth, local and regional travel patterns, and available transportation modes, costs, and facilities along with the general demographics of the Project Area.

The ridership model forecasts have been updated for the FEIS. Changes and assumptions are summarized in the *Ridership Forecasts for NICTD Double Track-NWI Core Capacity Project and West Lake Corridor New Starts Project* (HDR 2017c). SSL daily boardings, including for the West Lake Corridor Project, are expected to increase from 12,050 in 2015 to 26,900 in 2037. When compared to the No-Build scenario, the SSL, including the West Lake Corridor Project, is expected to increase daily passenger trips by 4,010 in its opening year (2022) and by 6,300 in 2037. By 2037, the West Lake Corridor Project individually is projected to generate about 3,750 new transit trips that would be diverted from the automobile mode.