



# Scoping Booklet

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## Table of Contents

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SCOPING BOOKLET? .....	1
WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE PROJECT? .....	1
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE PROJECT? .....	1
WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS? .....	2
WHAT ALTERNATIVES WILL BE CONSIDERED? .....	3
WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES WILL BE STUDIED? .....	5
HOW CAN AGENCIES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATE? .....	6
WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?.....	7

## Acronyms

DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FEIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
IHB	Indiana Harbor Belt
LPA	Locally Preferred Alternative
MED	Metra Electric District
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NICTD	Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District
NIRPC	Northern Indiana Regional Planning Commission
ROD	Record of Decision
SSL	South Shore Line

## What Is The Purpose Of This Scoping Booklet?

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) have initiated the environmental review process for the West Lake Corridor Project (Project) in Lake County, Indiana and Cook County, Illinois in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other regulatory requirements. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared as part of this process, with the FTA as the Federal Lead Agency and NICTD as the Local Project Sponsor responsible for implementing the Project under NEPA. To determine the scope, content, and significant issues to be addressed in the EIS, FTA and NICTD are conducting agency and public “scoping.” This scoping booklet is intended to help interested parties understand the scoping process, provide pertinent information about the Project, and establish an early and open process for obtaining public and agency input.

## What Is The History Of The Project?

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 regional transportation studies. 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 the Project.



## What Is The Purpose And Need Of The Project?

NICTD’s existing South Shore Line (SSL) provides a vital transportation link that connects Northwest Indiana to Chicago and Cook County, Illinois. The proposed Project would involve 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. Specifically, the Project is intended to:

- 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

- 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



## What Is The Environmental Review Process?

NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the potential impacts of their actions on the human and natural environment and to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects where reasonably feasible. Since NICTD intends to seek federal funding for the Project, the FTA and NICTD must comply with NEPA.

The purpose of the environmental review process under NEPA is to promote informed decision-making by considering the potential environmental and social impacts of the Project. The FTA and NICTD will engage regulatory agencies with a defined interest in the Project and the public that could potentially be affected by the Project. The environmental review process is structured to encourage participation between government officials, agencies, private businesses, and citizens. The environmental review process involves the following steps:

- Scoping and Screening
- Draft Environmental Impact Statement
- Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

### Scoping and Screening

Scoping is the first step in the environmental review process under NEPA. It 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 Project. The input received during scoping will help to identify the appropriate alternatives and the depth and breadth of environmental analysis to be completed. It will also serve to identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues that are not significant or have been covered by prior studies. The following key steps will be conducted during the environmental scoping process:

- Invite local, regional, state, and federal agencies, Tribal Governments, and other interested parties to comment on the scope of the Project, including the purpose and need, alternatives considered, key issues evaluated, and evaluation methods;
- Connect previous planning decisions with current Project development;

### FTA Procedures

The FTA and NICTD will comply with applicable federal environmental laws, regulations, and executive orders during the environmental review process. These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Council on Environmental Quality implementing NEPA
- FTA's Regulations on Environmental Impact and Related Procedures
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's air quality conformity regulations
- Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990
- Section 404 of Clean Water Act
- Section 106 of National Historic Preservation Act
- Section 7 of Endangered Species Act
- Section 4(f) of Department of Transportation Act
- Executive Order 11988 on Floodplain Management
- Executive Order 11990 on Wetlands
- Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice
- DOT Order 5610.2(a) on Environmental Justice.

NICTD intends to seek federal funding for the Project under FTA's New Starts program. The New Starts program involves a multi-year, multi-step process, including the environmental review procedures, which project sponsors must complete before federal funding is approved. The steps in the New Starts process and basic requirements of this federal funding program can be found on FTA's website at [www.fta.dot.gov](http://www.fta.dot.gov).

- Establish a decision-making framework; and
- Determine the scope and significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the EIS.

A broad range of reasonable alternatives will be considered for the Project from the onset. The alternatives will be evaluated and screened based on operational and engineering constraints, constructability, cost, and environmental concerns. This screening will narrow the alternatives and provide a more well-defined Project that will advance into the Draft EIS (DEIS).

## Draft Environmental Impact Statement

A DEIS document will be prepared following scoping and screening to more fully assess the Project. The DEIS will:

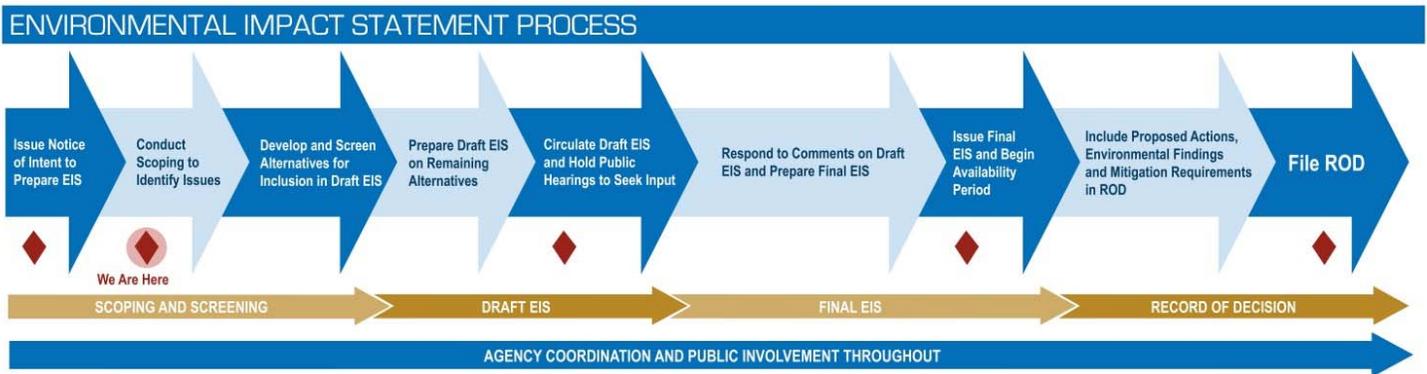
- Identify Purpose and Need for Project;
- Describe Project and alternatives considered;
- Evaluate affected environment and potential environmental impacts of Project;
- Propose actions that will help mitigate unavoidable impacts;
- Enable decision-makers to identify solution that best meets Purpose and Need; and
- Provide public and agencies opportunities to review and comment on Project.

The DEIS document will be circulated for public and agency comment over a 45-day review

period. During this time, a public hearing(s) will be held to present the results of the DEIS and formally record all comments received. Following the public review period, NICTD will select a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Project that can further advance in the environmental review process, as well as FTA’s New Starts funding program.

## Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

In order to complete the environmental review process, a Final EIS (FEIS) would be prepared by the FTA and NICTD. The FEIS would respond to comments received on the DEIS and include the LPA selected for the Project. The FTA would also issue a Record of Decision (ROD) that states the proposed action, environmental findings, and mitigation requirements.



◆ Official Public Opportunity for Comment during EIS Process

NOTE: A single FEIS and ROD can be issued under MAP-21, unless FTA determines a combined document is not possible.

## What Alternatives Will Be Considered?

The EIS will evaluate a No Build Alternative and a Commuter Rail Alternative. A description of each alternative is provided below.

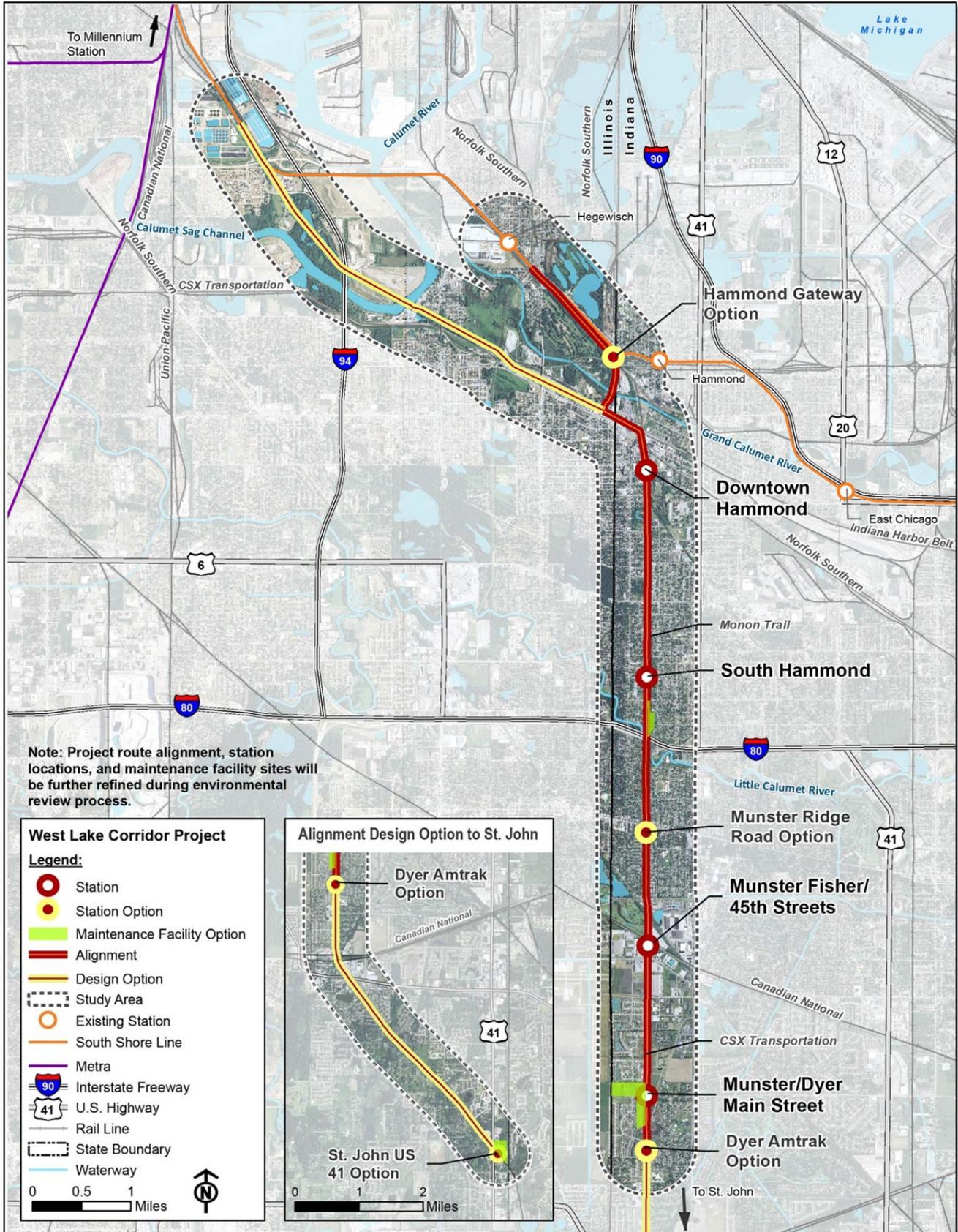
### No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative is defined as the existing transportation system, plus any committed transportation improvements included in NIRPC’s 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan. It would not include a major transit investment in the West Lake Corridor. As such, the No Build Alternative serves as the NEPA baseline against which the environmental effects of the proposed Project are measured.

### Commuter Rail Alternative

The Commuter Rail Alternative would involve an approximate 9-mile southern extension of NICTD’s existing SSL between Dyer and Hammond, Indiana. The Project would include:

- New track improvements along existing CSX Transportation and former Monon railroad corridors, with flyover to existing SSL in Hammond;
- Four stations at Munster/Dyer Main Street, Munster Fisher/45th Streets, South Hammond, and Downtown Hammond; and
- Maintenance facility to store and maintain vehicles.



West Lake Corridor Project Study Area

Trains on the new Project branch line would connect with the existing SSL and ultimately the Metra Electric District's (MED) line to the north, providing new transit service between Dyer and Metra's Millennium Station in Downtown Chicago. To facilitate this, core capacity improvements to the existing MED line and Millennium Station may be required to accommodate the Project.



Two alignment design options are also being considered for the Project, including a possible extension to St. John on the southern end and another that would share the Indiana Harbor Belt (IHB) Kensington Branch on the northern end. Design options for four other possible station locations and three potential maintenance facility sites are also being studied. The Project route alignment, station locations, and maintenance facility sites will be further refined during the environmental review process, working in close consultation with the public, agencies, and key stakeholders.



## What Environmental Resources Will Be Studied?

The EIS will evaluate potential effects to the human and natural environments under the No Build and Commuter Rail Alternatives. The environmental resources to be analyzed in the EIS include:

- Transportation
- Land Use and Zoning
- Land Acquisitions and Displacements
- Socioeconomics and Economic Development
- Environmental Justice
- Neighborhood and Community Facilities
- Parks and Recreational
- Historic and Archeological
- Noise and Vibration
- Visual and Aesthetic
- Air Quality
- Energy
- Farmlands, Soils, and Geology
- Water
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Hazardous Materials
- Safety and Security
- Utilities
- Short-Term Construction Impacts
- Secondary and Cumulative Effects
- Section 4(f) Evaluation



## How Can Agencies And Public Participate?

### What Agencies Are Involved?

In addition to FTA and NICTD, a number of local, regional, state, and federal agencies have been invited to participate in the environmental review process. These agencies include, but are not limited to:

#### Local

- City of Calumet City
- City of Chicago
- City of Hammond
- Cook County
- Lake County
- Town of Dyer
- Town of Munster
- Town of St. John
- Village of Burnham
- Village of Dolton

#### Regional

- Chicago Department of Transportation
- Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
- Chicago Transit Authority
- Metra
- Northeastern Illinois Regional Transportation Authority
- Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority
- Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

#### State

- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Illinois Department of Transportation
- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
- Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
- Illinois State Department of Agriculture
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Indiana Department of Transportation
- Indiana State Department of Agriculture

#### Federal

- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Railroad Administration
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- U.S. Department of Interior
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

#### Tribal Governments

- Ho-Chunk Nation
- Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska
- Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma
- Miami Tribe of Oklahoma
- Otoe-Missouria Tribe
- Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma
- Potawatomi - Citizen Potawatomi Nation
- Potawatomi - Forest County Potawatomi
- Potawatomi - Hannahville Indian Community
- Potawatomi - Pokagon Band of Potawatomi
- Potawatomi - Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation
- Sac and Fox Tribe of Mississippi in Iowa/Meskaki
- Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri
- Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma
- Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska

The FTA emphasizes early coordination with agencies to ensure that the environmental review process satisfies NEPA and other regulatory requirements. Several diverse outreach strategies and techniques will be undertaken over the course of the EIS process. Early and continuous involvement with agencies, outreach with major stakeholders, and meaningful public participation will be critical to advancing the Project into the next implementation phase.

### When Will Scoping Meetings be Held?

Agency and public scoping meetings will be conducted the following dates, locations, and times:

#### Agency Scoping

When: October 28, 2014

Where: Center for Visual and Performing Arts,  
1040 Ridge Road, Munster, IN 46321

Time: 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM

#### Public Scoping

When: October 28, 2014

Where: Center for Visual and Performing Arts,  
1040 Ridge Road, Munster, IN 46321

Time: 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM

## How Can You Submit Comments?

The public can submit comments at the scoping meeting, either written on comment cards or given verbally to the on-site Court Reporter. In addition to the scoping meetings, comments can also be submitted via:

Project Website: <http://www.nictdwestlake.com>  
E-mail: [project.email@nictdwestlake.com](mailto:project.email@nictdwestlake.com)  
Automated Phone: 219-250-2920 (comment via voicemail)  
Mail: NICTD West Lake Corridor Project  
33 East U.S. Highway 12  
Chesterton, IN 46304

**Scoping comments must be submitted by November 11, 2014.**

## What Are The Next Steps?

Scoping comments will be documented and considered in refining the Project's Purpose and Need, alternatives considered, potential environmental effects to be studied, and agency coordination and public involvement process for the Project. The DEIS will be prepared following the scoping process, with a 45-day public circulation period targeted for fall 2015. Following the comment period on the DEIS, an FEIS would be prepared by the FTA and NICTD to complete the environmental review process. The FTA would also issue a ROD that states the proposed action, environmental findings, and mitigation requirements. The environmental review process would be followed by more detailed design, engineering, vehicle acquisition, and construction. Service start-up for the West Lake Corridor Project is targeted for 2023.