



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Study Purpose

This study determines the feasibility of a new roadway corridor for re-routing through-traffic on major highways from the downtown area of the City of LaPorte. The study conforms to Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) feasibility study guidelines as well as the Indiana Department of Transportation's (INDOT's) Early Environmental Streamlining guidelines. The study addresses three basic points:

- The degree to which a preferred alternative, traffic management strategy or roadway design is economically justified.
- The degree to which an alternative is considered preferable from an environmental and a social perspective.
- The degree to which eventual construction and operation of the preferred alternative can be financed and managed.

Major steps in the feasibility study included:

- Establishment of a steering committee that guided the study and a public outreach program that solicited public comment on the final alternatives.
- An inventory of existing conditions (traffic conditions, a special origin-destination survey to determine external traffic patterns on arteries entering the community, a land use trend analysis with and without possible intermodal centers, and definition of significant built and natural environmental features).
- Initiation of environmental streamlining activities (alerting environmental resource agencies to the project, defining the project "purpose and need," and screening alternatives for review).
- Evaluation of the alternatives to identify the most viable (prudent and feasible) alternative(s) based on achievement of project "purpose and need," traffic considerations, community and environmental considerations, and public input.
- Documentation of the results of the process and recommendation of the next steps.

### Study Impetus

Over 40 years ago, LaPorte Mayor Tom Boyd was convinced of the need for a project to route traffic to the east and west sides of the city. Boyd Boulevard from US 35 south (Indiana Avenue) to SR 2 east (Lincolnway) on the east side of the city was the only portion of the ambitious vision that was ever completed. There have been various attempts to promote the concept since then. Among these, the Greater LaPorte Chamber of Commerce spearheaded research into how a bypass could enhance access to the Thomas Rose Industrial Park and east side industries. The Highway Improvement and Development Plans for the City of LaPorte, Michigan City and LaPorte County include among its 15-year goals the development of a new economic development corridor involving a four-lane, limited-access highway. In 2004, the United States Congress earmarked \$250,000 for a feasibility study of the new economic development corridor. Under the direction of the City of LaPorte Steering Committee, Bernardin, Lochmueller and Associates began working on the study last year.

### Issues

During the progress of the study, two major developments occurred that may have a profound impact on travel and growth patterns in the City of LaPorte and LaPorte County: the Illiana Expressway and intermodal centers. The Illiana Expressway is a possible freeway from I-57 to I-65 passing through Will County in Illinois and Lake County in Indiana, jointly sponsored by both states and their respective departments of transportation, with the State of Indiana in the lead. Preliminary concepts for this freeway included the possibilities of a western extension from I-57 to I-80 in Illinois and an eastern extension from I-65 to I-94 through Porter and LaPorte counties. In the spring of 2007, the Indiana General Assembly limited preliminary studies on the feasibility of the Illiana Expressway to the portion from I-57 to I-65.



### City of LaPorte, Indiana

To address the possible traffic impacts of intermodal centers, this study examined future traffic conditions without any intermodal centers and with one or more intermodal centers. Because the intermodal centers are a private development initiative, information on the exact location, magnitude and timing of development of the centers was not available for this study. Thus, assumptions had to be made relative to the approximate location of possible intermodal facilities, and the CenterPoint (BNSF) Intermodal Facility (Joliet, IL) was used as a model to estimate employees and truck traffic generated by such possible intermodal centers.

The Norfolk-Southern Intermodal Center was assumed to be located in the Pinola area straddling SR 2 between CR 500W and 18th Street on the west side of the City of LaPorte. The Canadian-National Center was assumed to be located near Union Mills straddling US 6 between SR 39 on the east and roughly CR 500W on the west. A June 29, 2007, *Herald-Argus* newspaper article reported on the purchase of property in the Union Mills Area for a CSX facility rather than a Canadian-National facility as initially assumed by this study. The CSX Center was assumed to be located in the Kingsbury area east of the existing Kingsbury Industrial Park straddling US 6 between CR 600E and the St. Joseph County Line. However, a detailed examination was not made of the possible traffic impacts of this third intermodal center because there was no knowledge of acquisition for such a center and the likelihood of three intermodal centers was deemed remote.

To predict future traffic patterns, identify future transportation needs and assess the performance of transportation improvement options with and without intermodal centers, a unique travel demand model was developed for LaPorte County and validated against actual traffic counts for trucks and cars. From a review of existing traffic data, traffic forecasts from the LaPorte Travel Demand Model and input from other people, the following conclusions were reached:

- The downtown intersection of Lincolnway (SR 2) and Pine Lake Avenue (US 35), which experiences backups today, will experience gridlock by the year 2030 unless traffic is diverted, regardless of the addition of an intermodal facility in the LaPorte area.
- The accident rate on Lincolnway (State Road 2) between Pine Lake Avenue (U.S. Highway 35) and Monroe Street (State Road 4) is among the top five percent in the State of Indiana.
- Truck traffic in the downtown area is increasing faster than other vehicular traffic, and will double by the year 2030, even without the addition of an intermodal facility in the LaPorte area.
- Traffic flow is presently impeded by the large number of traffic signals on SR 2 and US 35.
- Traffic congestion in the downtown area has been increasing; and, if an intermodal facility is developed, the rate of increase will grow dramatically for autos and particularly trucks.
- Truck access to major industrial sites is already seriously impeded.
- Highway access between LaPorte and Michigan City is inadequate now and will be an even bigger concern in the near future.

Relative to possible intermodal center impacts, an intermodal center in the Pinola area would reinforce the need to widen already congested US 421 to four lanes from SR 2 to I-94, overload SR 2 from US 421 to LaPorte and aggravate serious congestion problems in downtown LaPorte. An intermodal center near Union Mills would also reinforce the need to widen already congested US 421 to four lanes from SR 2 (and possibly the south junction of US 6) to I-94, overload US 6 from US 421 to SR 39 and aggravate serious congestion problems in downtown LaPorte. Preliminary traffic forecasts indicate that SR 4, SR 104 and US 6 would be overloaded by an intermodal facility east of Kingsbury, if it were the magnitude of the CenterPoint facility.



## Project Goals

Project goals were reviewed, revised and refined as the study progressed. The project goals include:

- Reduce congestion in the City of LaPorte's central business district, especially by facilitating the movement of trucks.
- Improve vehicular and pedestrian safety.
- Enhance access to City of LaPorte industrial and commercial locations.
- Facilitate access to new site for industrial and commercial development.
- Enhance regional transportation development, including improved connectivity between the City of LaPorte and Michigan City.

## Alternatives

The feasibility study examined a wide range of alternatives ranging from low-capital cost transportation system management improvements to major capital investments along existing and new roadway alignments. The major investment alternatives evaluated include (see Figure ES-1):

- Widening of existing roadways.
- Creating a "one way pair" of streets to expand capacity.
- Developing a new "Inner Loop" roadway (4 variations).
- Developing a new "Outer Loop" roadway.

## Evaluation and Preferred Alternative

The results of the performance evaluation of the transportation system management and major capital investments on existing roadway alignments (that is the widening of Lincolnway to six lanes and the one-way pair comprised of Lincolnway and Washington Street) are briefly described below. The evaluation of the new terrain alternatives is also described below, and is summarized in Table ES-1.

The Inner Loop Alternative (see Figure ES-1) is considered the preferred alternative based on the evaluation of the options relative to achievement of project goals (purpose and need), traffic consideration, community and environmental considerations, agency considerations and public comment. The Travel Demand Management, Transportation System Management, Intelligent Transportation System and Mass Transit options fail to address project goals because of the magnitude of truck and total vehicle growth in the community. The Widening Alternative fails to meet any of the five project goals, fails to relieve downtown congestion or to divert external traffic, displaces about 50 businesses and homes, adversely impacts historic structures and districts, adversely affects downtown businesses through the loss of on-street parking, makes pedestrian circulation more difficult, and is opposed by the community.

The Lincolnway-Washington One-Way Pair Alternative is the only Build Alternative diverting sufficient traffic from Lincolnway to achieve an acceptable level-of-service at downtown intersections; however, the One-Way Pair option fails to meet the five project goals, particularly the reduction of downtown truck traffic. The traffic circulation effectiveness of the One-Way Pair Alternative is severely hampered by the fact that the US 35 (Pine Lake Avenue) viaduct over the Norfolk-Southern Railroad mainline passes over Washington Street and first returns to grade at Lincolnway (SR 2). Due to circuitous travel, this option results in higher traffic volumes throughout downtown than the No Build condition, and requires Madison Street and Michigan Avenue to become north-south one-way connectors between Lincolnway and Washington Street. The abandoned railroad right-of-way on the transitions from Lincolnway to Washington Street has reverted to abutting property owners and must be required damaging businesses. This option has an adverse impact on historic structures and properties due to increased traffic, and adversely affects downtown businesses due to the loss of on-street parking and more difficult pedestrian circulation. Based on public input, this option is unacceptable to the community.

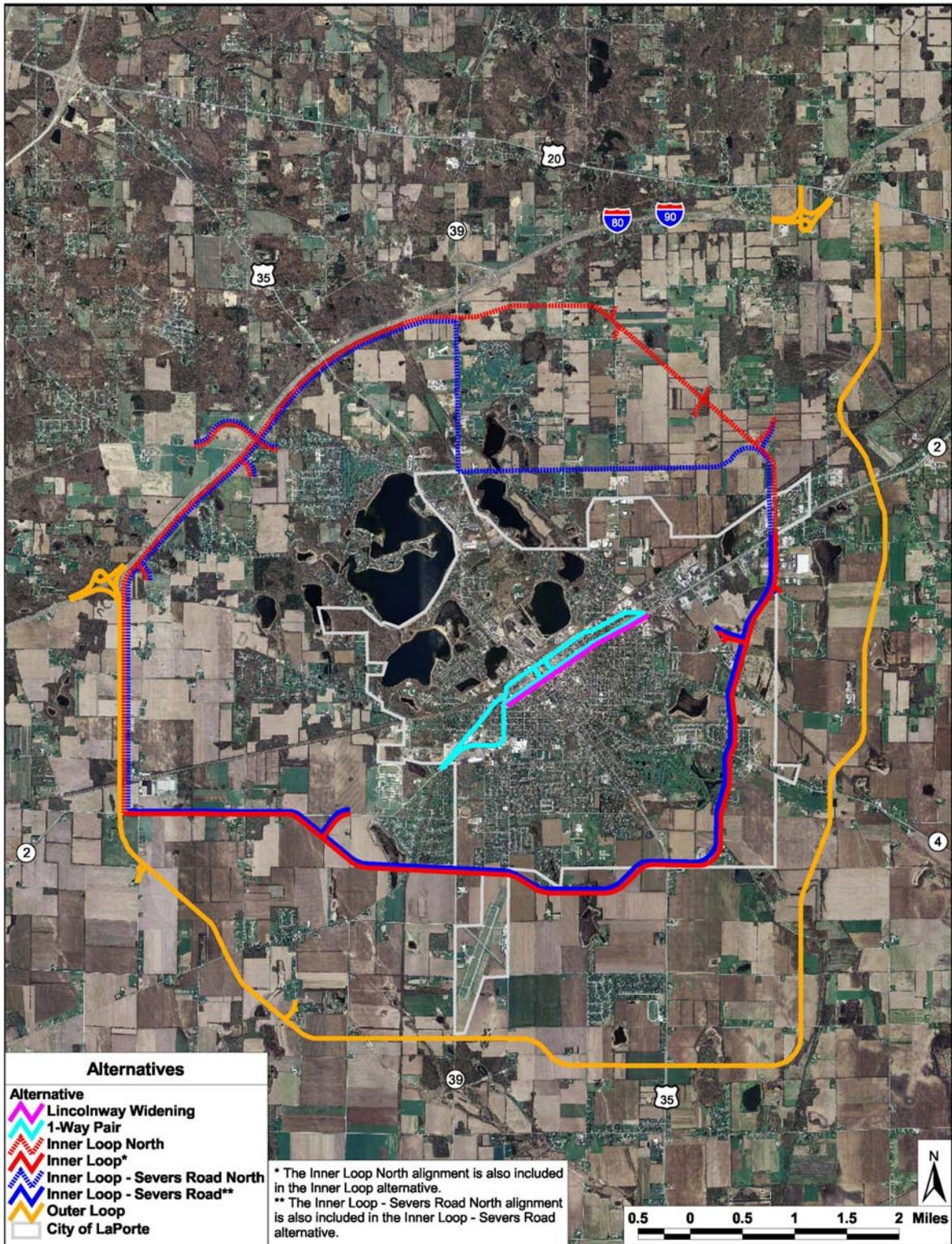


Figure ES-1: Alternatives



**Table ES-1: New Alignment Alternative Evaluation Summary**

Socio-Economic/Environmental Measure	Alternative				
	Inner Loop	Inner Loop – Severs Road	Outer Loop	Inner Loop – Northern Half	Inner Loop – Severs Road Northern Half
<b>COSTS</b>					
<b>TOTAL (Millions of 2007 dollars)</b>	\$163.3	\$174.9	\$174.3	\$94.5 (\$48.2 if 2-lane)	\$106.8 (\$43.6 if 2-lane)
Length (Miles)	23.0	23.7	18.8	13.0	12.0
Railroad Crossings	4	7	3	2	5
Construction Costs (Millions)	\$118.2	\$124.5	\$136.5	\$69.4	\$76.0
Right-of-Way Costs (Millions)	\$11.7	\$14.8	\$9.7	\$6.8	\$10.1
Engineering & Environmental Costs (Million)	\$33.4	\$35.6	\$28.1	\$18.3	\$20.7
<b>TRAFFIC PERFORMANCE</b>					
Meet Purpose and Need (Project Goals)	Somewhat (3 achieved, 2 neutral)	Somewhat (3 achieved, 2 neutral)	No (4 fail, 1 neutral)	Somewhat (2 achieved, 3 neutral)	No (3 fail, 2 neutral)
Performance (Compared to Other Alternatives)	Best= 1st	Next Best = 2nd	NextWorst = 4th	Middle = 3rd	Worst = 5th
<b>LAND USE* (acres)</b>					
Agricultural	343	341	670	196	195
Residential	9	12	8	3	5
Commercial/Industrial/Transportation	5	6	1	4	4
Grassland/Herbaceous	17	15	30	11	9
<b>RELOCATIONS</b>					
Residences Acquired	15	19	19	9	13
Residences Damaged	3	4	3	3	4
Businesses Acquired	7	7	2	1	1
Businesses Damaged	0	0	0	0	0
Transmission Line Towers Moved	1	2	2	1	2
<b>OTHER COMMUNITY/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS</b>					
<b>HISTORIC PROPERTIES**</b>					
Listed in National Register of Historic Places	0	0	0	0	0
Listed in Indiana Register of Historic Sites/ Structures	0	0	0	0	0
IHSSI*** "Outstanding" and "Notable" Sites	1(Bush Farm)	2 (Bush & SR 39)	1(Ames House)	1(Bush Farm)	2 (Bush & SR 39)
<b>ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES (Recorded)</b>	1	1	0	0	0
<b>WETLANDS (NWI) (Total Acres)</b>	20	20	14	14	13
Emergent (Acres)	7	8	11	2	3
Scrub/Shrub (Acres)	5	5	2	4	4
Forested (Acres)	8	7	1	8	6
<b>PONDS (Acres)</b>	1	1	1	<1	1
<b>FOREST LAND (Acres)</b>	91	93	150	67	69
<b>STREAM IMPACTS (USGS) (streams crossed)</b>	1	1	9	0	0
<b>TES**** RECORD AREAS</b>	3	4	0	1	2
<b>CEMETERIES</b>	0	1 (Pine Lake)	0	0	1 (Pink Lake)
<b>PARKS</b>	0	0	0	0	0

Green = Good

White = Neutral

Pink = Bad

\* Land use from USGS National Land Cover Dataset (1992)

\*\* Refers to direct take and not visual, noise, or other effects

\*\*\* Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory

\*\*\*\*Threatened & Endangered Species (from Indiana Natural Heritage Database)



## City of LaPorte, Indiana

The Outer Loop Alternative fails to meet project goals because it is too far from the community despite future growth on the edge of the existing City of LaPorte boundaries. This alternative does not offer shorter travel times that would divert significant auto and truck traffic passing through the city on major arteries, and the traffic performance of the alternative does not improve with the introduction of intermodal centers. This particular alternative requires almost twice as much new right-of-way as the other new terrain options, does not have fewer relocations than the other new terrain options, has the greatest adverse impact on prime agricultural lands, impacts nine streams compared to one or none for other new terrain options, and impacts nearly twice the forest land of other new terrain options.

While the Inner Loop-Severs Road Alternative provides the best access to the expanding industrial area on the northeast side of the City of LaPorte, the lack of a circumferential connection from US 35 and SR 39 on the north side of the city to and from SR 2 (Lincolnway) on the east side of the city impairs the effectiveness of this option in diverting through-traffic. While comparable to the Inner Loop relative to land acquired and relocations, this alternative impacts one more historic structure, one more cemetery and one more recorded threatened and endangered species area than the Inner Loop. Due to the limited land area between Horseshoe Lake and Fishtrap Lake, wetlands and Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad, this option bridges over the south end of Horseshoe Lake, the railroad and wetlands to achieve an acceptable alignment and to minimize adverse impacts on homes and natural resources. This option also requires three grade separations of the same railroad (the Chicago South Shore & South Bend Railroad).

When a partial loop is considered using the northern half of the Inner Loop Alternative or the Inner Loop-Severs Alternative, the Inner Loop North continues to divert through-traffic from SR 2 through the city and from US 35 and SR 39 from the north side of the city to and from the east or west side of the city. In contrast, the Inner Loop-Severs Road North Alternative fails to divert through-traffic from SR 2 in the city and can only divert through-traffic from US 35 and SR 39 from the north side of the City to the west side of the city. Accordingly, construction can be phased more effectively relative to growth and available funding sources for the Inner Loop Alternative than the Inner Loop-Severs Road Alternative.

## Preferred Alternative Phasing

In the phasing of construction of the Inner Loop (see Figure ES-2), the completion of the northern half is considered more important because it will divert through-traffic from SR 2, divert heavier external traffic volumes from US 35 and SR 39 to SR 2 east and west of the city, divert traffic from possible intermodal centers at Pinola or Union Mills going to Michigan via I-94 or to the east via the Toll Road or SR 2 that would otherwise pass through downtown LaPorte, provide access to the expanding industrial area on the northeast side of the city, provide relief to Johnson Road serving the growing residential area between Michigan City and the City of LaPorte, eliminate the need to use Severs Road as a truck route from US 35 and SR 39 to the industrial area on the northeast side of the city, and provide opportunities for expansion of the industrial area on the northeast side of the City.

While the entire Inner Loop of 20.2 miles (plus 2.8 miles of crossroad improvements) carries a total project price tag of about \$163.3 million (in 2007 dollars), the northern half of the Inner Loop of 10.9 miles (plus 2.1 miles of crossroad improvements) from SR 2 at CR 500W around the north side of the city to SR 2 at Fail Road is about \$94.5 million. If right-of-way were purchased for an eventual four-lane divided facility and only two lanes initially constructed, the price tag for the northern half of the Inner Loop would be about \$48.2 million. For the purposes of construction, the northern half of the Inner Loop may be broken into two segments of independent utility: 1) northwest segment from SR 2 at CR 500W to SR 39 (6.3 miles at \$28.9 million for two lanes) and 2) northeast segment from SR 39 to SR 2 at Fail Road (4.6 miles at \$19.3 million for two lanes). The choice of priority between the northwest segment and northeast segment depends upon the status of the development of intermodal centers. If one or both of the possible intermodal centers at Pinola or Union Mills proceeds, the northwest segment will have to be completed as soon as possible to divert heavy truck traffic and employee trips from downtown LaPorte.

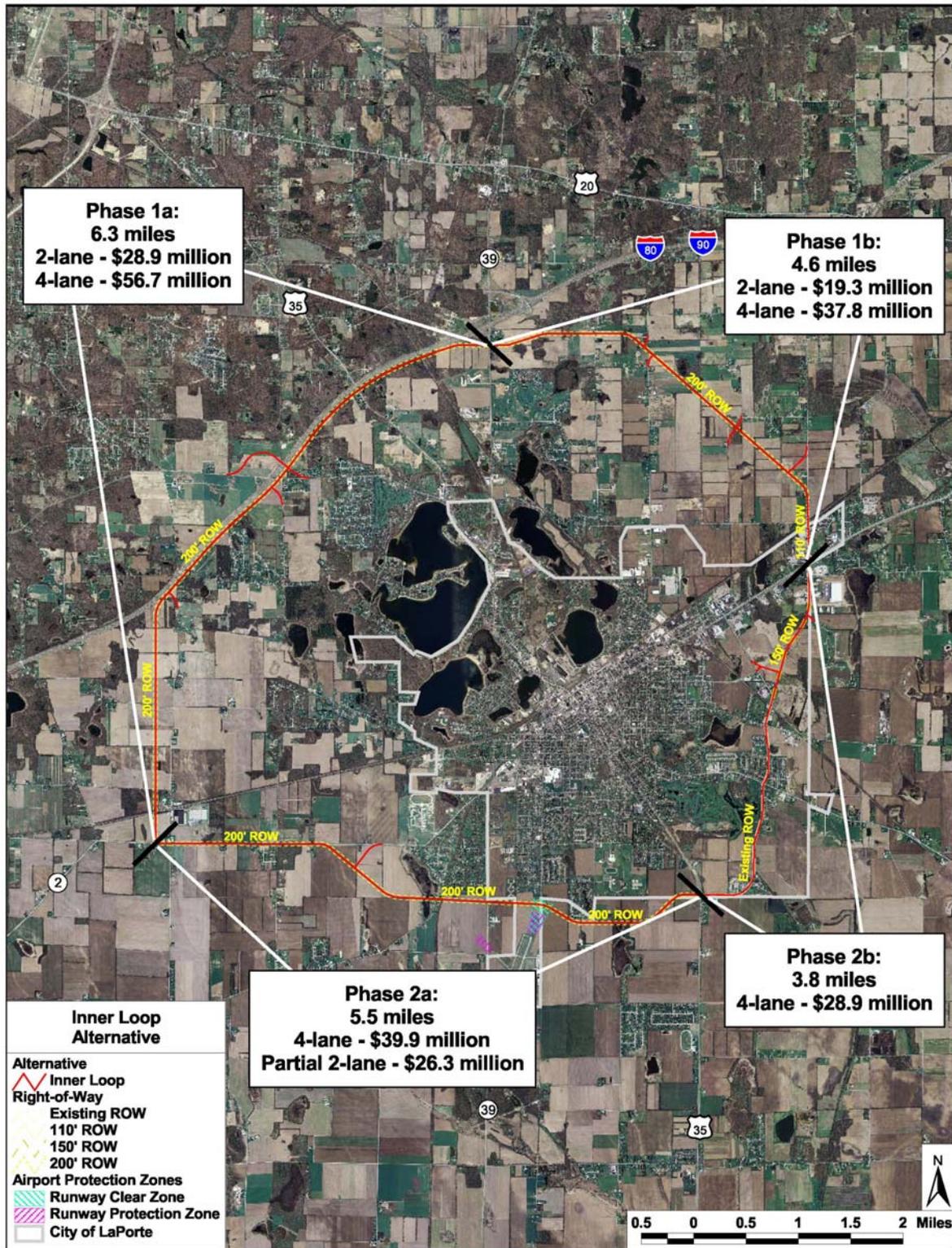


Figure ES-2: Inner Loop Alternative Phasing



## City of LaPorte, Indiana

If the intermodal centers fail to proceed toward development, the northeast segment provides the opportunity for improved industrial expansion and access to the northeast side of the city and for the relief of Severs Road between the industrial area and SR 39 and US 35.

Although the southern half of the Inner Loop will divert through-traffic from SR 2, it is considered less important because it will divert less traffic from downtown, will not divert truck traffic bound to Michigan via I-94 and to the east via the Toll Road, and will not improve access to the expanding industrial area on the northeast side of LaPorte. The southern half of the Inner Loop of 9.3 miles (plus 0.7 miles of crossroad improvements) from SR 2 at CR 500W around the south side of the city to SR 2 at Fail Road is about \$68.8 million (in 2007 dollars). For the purpose of construction, the southern half of the Inner Loop may also be broken into two segments of independent utility: 1) southwest segment from SR 2 at CR 500W to US 35 at Boyd Boulevard (5.5 miles plus 0.4 miles of crossroad improvements at \$39.9 million for four lanes) and 2) the southeast segment using portions of Boyd Boulevard and Fail Road (3.8 miles plus 0.3 miles of crossroad improvements at \$28.9 million for four lanes). In the case of the southwest segment, the new terrain portion from relocated SR 2 to US 35 might be initially constructed as two lanes on right-of-way for four lanes reducing the cost to \$26.3 million. As Boyd Boulevard already exists as a two-lane facility, no option is provided for less than four lanes for the southeast segment due to forecasted daily volumes in the year 2030.

## Feasibility

Numerous resources were consulted to examine revenue source possibilities at the federal, state and local level for the Inner Loop. The Indiana Department of Transportation began allocating federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds in 2003 to the newly created Michigan City-LaPorte Urbanized Area from the Group II pool (urbanized areas under 200,000 persons). As the annual allocation is about \$1.2 million for expansion projects according to *Connections 2030* [the long-range transportation plan of June 21, 2007, prepared by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC)], there are insufficient funds within the six-year period of the typical Federal Highway Act to fund a segment of the Inner Loop.

According to *Connections 2030*, statewide federal Surface Transportation Program funds amount to about \$35.3 million (\$44.1 million when matched) per year for Northwest Indiana with about 75 percent going to preservation projects and 25 percent going to expansion projects. Under *Major Moves* (the INDOT 10-year highway construction program), major preservation projects include the following rehabilitation and reconstruction improvements:

- I-94 from SR 49 to east of US 421,
- I-94 from US 20 to the State Line,
- SR 4 from SR 2 to Boyd Boulevard in LaPorte,
- US 30 from US 421 to SR 39,
- US 35 from Kingsbury to SR 2 in LaPorte, and
- US 421 from I-80/I-90 to south of I-94.

At the present time, the committed INDOT expansion projects in *Major Moves* and the *INDOT 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan* are:

- Added travel lanes on SR 2 from K Street to 1<sup>st</sup> Street in the City of LaPorte in year 2011,
- Reconstruction of the ramp from eastbound US 20 to eastbound US 20/35 in year 2011, and
- Added travel lanes on US 421 from the south to the north junction of SR 2 in Westville in year 2010.

Several expansion projects in the prior *Connections 2030* long-range transportation plan have been placed in the unfunded category in the new *Connections 2030* plan and *INDOT 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan*:

- Added travel lanes on US 421 from SR 2 to I-80/I-90, added travel lanes on US 20 from County Line Road to Ohio Street in Michigan City,



- Added travel lanes on US 20 from US 20/US 35/SR 212 interchange to I-94 interchange, and
- Added travel lanes on SR 39 from US 35 to Severs Road in LaPorte.

In light of the shift of several previous projects in *Connections 2030* to the unfunded category, statewide federal Surface Transportation Program funds appear to be fully programmed along with other federal funding sources such as National Highway System funds and Interstate Maintenance funds. **Nevertheless, if federal revenues were to increase on the national level, the statewide federal Surface Transportation Program is the most likely traditional federal source for the Inner Loop.**

The last potential federal funding source is a United States Congressional earmark of federal transportation funds in a highway appropriations bill. Although LaPorte County has received a substantial earmark in the past, the possibility of receiving a federal earmark is not sufficient to put a project in the funded category.

In the past, INDOT has used state funds to match federal funds and for the maintenance and preservation of the existing highway system. However, major economic development initiatives have also garnered state funds for major highway improvements. The Indiana Development Corporation also has an Industrial Development Grant Fund that provides up to 50 percent of the off-site infrastructure costs for new and expanded industrial plants. **With the possibility of one or more intermodal facilities in LaPorte County, a public-private partnership to fund needed off-site infrastructure improvements such as the north portion of the Inner Loop is a distinct possibility.**

At the local level, most funding sources (gaming, Motor Vehicle Highway Account, State-Aid Local Road and Street Funds) have gone for the basic operation and maintenance of streets, and jurisdictions make a special appropriation from their General Fund to match federal funds for highways projects. The City of LaPorte and LaPorte County have dedicated their Riverboat gaming funds to street operation and maintenance for the time being, and the magnitude of gaming funds is not sufficient to fund a major roadway capital investment.

From the proceeds of the long-term lease of the Indiana Toll Road, LaPorte County, with all of its jurisdictions, received a one-time contribution of \$40 million. Of this amount, LaPorte County controls \$25.7 million and the City of LaPorte controls \$4.6 million. The City of LaPorte has already programmed its funds. LaPorte County may not have programmed all of its funds, but the property tax situation in Indiana makes it difficult for local jurisdictions to program special funding sources.

The transition from a depreciation based property tax assessment system to a fair market value property tax system remains in flux; thus, local elected officials are reluctant to adjust general revenue funding sources until more is known. There are three local county option income taxes: the County Adjusted Gross Income Tax (CAGIT), the County Option Income Tax (COIT), and the County Economic Development Income Tax (CEDIT). In the northwest, LaPorte County has adopted CAGIT at 0.5 percent and CEDIT at 0.45 percent. Porter County has adopted CEDIT at 0.5 percent. Lake County has adopted no local income tax. Surrounding LaPorte County, the combined local income tax rates are 1.25 percent in Marshall County, 1.03 percent in Starke County and 0.8 percent in St. Joseph County. While LaPorte may not wish to be at a competitive disadvantage to Lake and Porter counties in northwest Indiana, most combined local income tax rates are higher in most Indiana counties, including counties in metropolitan areas.

The Municipal Option Income Tax provision (1.0 percent for residents and .05 percent for non-residents) expired in 2005, and has not been reauthorized by the Indiana General Assembly despite the *Hometown Matters* initiative of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns this spring.

As of spring of 2006, 43 counties in Indiana had adopted the Local Option Highway User Tax (LOHUT), commonly known as the "wheel tax." The LOHUT is actually the combination of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax which applies to light vehicles and the Vehicle Wheel Tax which applies to trucks. The excise tax ranges from two percent to ten percent or \$7.50 to \$25.00, and the wheel tax ranges from \$5.00 to \$40.00. None of the counties in northwest Indiana has adopted the LOHUT. Using 2005 vehicle



## City of LaPorte, Indiana

registrations, LaPorte County could generate \$2.4 million per year with a \$25 flat rate excise tax and another \$0.6 million per year with a \$40 wheel tax. The funding is distributed 60 percent on the basis of population and 40 percent on the basis of road mileage. Thus, LaPorte County would retain \$1.6 million and the City of LaPorte would receive \$450,000 of the \$1.4 million distributed to incorporated areas. However, the amount of funds derived from LOHUT is not sufficient alone to fund major highway capital investments.

Indiana counties may also impose a 1.0 percent Food and Beverage Tax that would raise about \$1.5 million annually for LaPorte County based on NIRPC estimates in the *Connections 2030* plan (page II-26).

The creation of Economic Development Project Districts (applied to gross retail sales and use taxes) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts (increment in property tax revenues) are possible for investments to encourage economic development. The City of LaPorte has created TIF districts in the past and several cities and counties have created TIF districts to make roadway improvements serving new industrial areas. As the industrial area in the northeast corner of the City of LaPorte expands, a TIF district is a likely mechanism to fund infrastructure to support new business development (such as the extension of Genesis Drive/CR 50W from Severs Road northward to the Inner Loop to provide an alternate truck route to Severs Road).

Finally, it should be noted that the revenues of the federal government and State of Indiana for transportation have not kept pace with inflation and that a number of states have modified their gasoline taxes to include a combination of a flat rate and percent of price to keep pace with inflation.

In conclusion, the most desirable arrangement for funding the Inner Loop is a private-public partnership arising from the development of one or more intermodal centers in LaPorte County. In light of the federal and state funding constraints and the instability of the property tax revenue situation, the financial situation is anticipated to improve by the year 2017 when the *Major Moves* 10-year highway improvement program has been completed. Further, project development typically requires seven to ten years before construction begins. **Thus, the ability to identify and program \$48.2 million for the northern portion of the Inner Loop as an initial two-lane facility is viewed as economically feasible by the year 2017 when construction would begin.**

## Recommendations

The evaluation of transportation management and transit options and Build Alternatives involving the Widening of SR 2, Lincolnway/Washington One-Way Pair and five new terrain options, (Inner Loop, Inner Loop-Severs Road, Outer Loop, Inner Loop North and Inner Loop-Severs Road North) leads to the conclusion that **the Inner Loop best addresses project goals and is economically justified, preferable from an environmental and social perspective and can be financed and managed.**

While the Inner Loop diverts significant traffic from key intersections in downtown LaPorte, it does not remove sufficient traffic alone to achieve an acceptable level-of-service (LOS). However, the achievement of the stated purpose and need of “reducing congestion in the City of LaPorte’s central business district, especially by facilitating the movement of trucks,” is not measured merely by achieving an acceptable LOS, but also by the LOS on major arteries entering the community, the extent heavy truck traffic is reduced downtown, and the reduction of traffic flow impediments. Among the Build Alternatives, only the Lincolnway/Washington One-Way Pair option achieves an acceptable LOS at key downtown intersections. However, the One-Way Pair option fails to reduce truck traffic or traffic flow impediments, fails to achieve any of the other four project goals, and is considered environmentally and socially unacceptable by the community. **Thus, the Inner Loop is the only Build Alternative recommendation for consideration in further environmental and preliminary engineering studies.**

In view of the potential impacts to wetlands, historic structures, wildlife habitats and prime agricultural land, subsequent engineering and environmental assessment studies should lead to a full environmental impact statement. The subsequent studies should:



- Examine more extreme traffic flow improvements on SR 2 (Lincolnway) from US 35 (Pine Lake Avenue) to SR 4 (Monroe Street) such as the prohibition of left-turns on SR 2 at Michigan Avenue and Madison Street or the removal of traffic signals within a block of the SR 2/US 35 intersection and limiting cross-street traffic to right-in/right-out only movement.
- Examine adjustments to the Inner Loop corridor to avoid and minimize adverse impacts on the built and natural environment.
- Evaluate the extension of Boyd Boulevard from SR 2 (Lincolnway) over the Norfolk-Southern Railroad and northward as an option to using Fail Road due to potential impacts on wetlands and historic structures.
- Examine the possibility of a skewed intersection of the Inner Loop at Johnson Road so as to retain the existing Johnson Road overpass of the Indiana Toll Road and reduce residential displacements in the immediate area.
- Examine typical urban versus rural cross-sections relative to reducing right-of-way requirements, impacts and costs.

The evaluation of the future adequacy of the roadway network for the year 2030 also revealed the following:

- US 421 from SR 2 to I-94 needs to be widened to four lanes due to congestion (Level Of Service D) under the Baseline Forecast for year 2030. The project to add travel lanes from SR 2 to I-80/I-90 was removed from the previous *Connections 2030* plan and remains an unfunded project in the current long-range transportation plan. The *Major Moves* 10-year Highway Construction Program includes a preservation project on US 421 from I-80/I-90 to I-94 with a price tag of \$28.1 million. Using the INDOT Project Costing Tool, the total project cost of widening 6.3 miles of US 421 from SR 2 to I-94 is \$33.2 million to \$36.5 million (in 2007 dollars) depending on right-of-way needs. In the event that an intermodal center is developed in Pinola or Union Mills, nearly 70 percent of the truck traffic will be using US 421 to access the Toll Road and I-94 with as much as 7,000 additional trucks per day per intermodal center.
- SR 2 from US 421 to 18<sup>th</sup> Street in LaPorte experiences LOS D under the Baseline Forecast for year 2030. If an intermodal center is developed near Pinola, daily traffic volumes may increase by 10,000 vehicles per day at full build-out of the intermodal center. Widening about 5.6 miles of SR 2 from US 421 to CR 500W carries a cost of about \$29.5 million (in 2007 dollars).
- US 6 may experience an unacceptable LOS from US 421 to SR 39 if an intermodal center develops near Union Mills.
- Johnson Road from CR 500W to Kieffer Road (CR 400N) is a popular connector between the City of LaPorte and Michigan City, and will experience further traffic pressure as the area between the two cities grows. While the Johnson Road roadway surface should be maintained and safety improvements may be appropriate, added travel lanes on Johnson Road would divert traffic from state-maintained routes such as US 35 and SR 39. While Johnson Road and Kieffer Road are not a likely truck route from Pinola to the I-94 interchange US 421, through-trucks need to be prohibited in the advent of any intermodal center.
- Traffic forecasts do not support the need to widen SR 39 to four lanes from US 35 to Severs Road although the addition of left-turn lanes and a two-way center left-turn lane from US 35 to McClung Road may be appropriate. If the Inner Loop is built, the widening of SR 39 from the Inner Loop to the present four-lane section at the entry to the Toll Road would be desirable.

In as much as *Major Moves* provides \$28.1 million a major preservation project on US 421 from I-80/I-90 that approaches the cost of added travel lanes from SR 2 to I-94, consideration may be given to redefining the project in the *Connections 2030* plan.



## Next Steps

The next step in the process of developing the Inner Loop is to proceed with engineering and environment assessment studies leading to the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the entire loop. The first step to funding these studies is to include the Inner Loop in the Northwest Indiana Long-Range Transportation Plan – *Connections 2030*. While funding of the entire \$163.3 million project may prove difficult, the funding of \$48.2 million for the northern portion as an initial two-lane facility on four-lane right-of-way should be possible in as much as construction is not likely before the year 2017 unless a public-private partnership emerges as a result of the development of one or more intermodal centers. As an expansion project, the Transportation Plan Air Quality Conformity Analysis will have to be updated to demonstrate that the project does not have any adverse impact on air quality attainment.

Once the Inner Loop is included in *Connections 2030*, funding may be provided for the engineering and environmental assessment studies in the Northwest Indiana Transportation Improvement Program. The EIS should be prepared for the entire Inner Loop so that right-of-way needs and location can be defined to advance right-of-way preservation through the City of LaPorte and LaPorte County Thoroughfare Plan and subdivision regulations. In the interim, the Inner Loop corridor should appear on the new Thoroughfare Plan so that the corridor is not blocked by new development.