

REPORT ON THE PUBLIC WORKSHOP  
REGARDING PROPOSED SOUTH SHORE LINE  
IMPROVEMENTS IN MICHIGAN CITY



CITY OF MICHIGAN CITY  
AND  
NORTHERN INDIANA COMMUTER  
TRANSPORTATION DISTRICT (NICTD)

OCTOBER, 2009

**TND Planning Group**

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# I. Introduction

## Background

This report presents a summary of the initial public workshop on the proposed South Shore Line improvements. The workshop was sponsored by the City of Michigan City in cooperation with the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD). The workshop was facilitated by Stuart Sirota, AICP, Principal of TND Planning Group, a national consulting firm specializing in transportation and land use planning. Mr. Sirota has been working on Transit Oriented Development (TOD) planning issues related to the potential relocation of the South Shore Commuter Rail line and station in Michigan City since 2007.

Mr. Sirota was originally retained as a consultant to Andrews University during the design charrette held in September, 2007, which resulted in the North End Plan. During the charrette, NICTD was considering relocating the South Shore line through Michigan City, by abandoning the existing tracks and closing its two existing stations, and constructing one new, larger station with expanded facilities that would operate on new tracks, parallel to the existing CSX freight rail line, approximately one mile south of its current alignment. The objective of this relocation and realignment was to increase operating and maintenance efficiency, improve safety, and enhance the attractiveness of South Shore Line service to existing and prospective customers.

A primary recommendation of the North End Plan was that the South Shore Line be retained within the North End, with various improvements, in order to leverage TOD opportunities that could catalyze downtown revitalization and economic development. The North End Plan also recognized the benefits, albeit significantly higher costs of another option – that of moving the South

Shore Line north to parallel the existing Amtrak tracks along Lake Michigan. The North End plan included this alternative in the appendix, stating that if costs and other obstacles could be addressed, this option would also help leverage TOD opportunities.

In the wake of the charrette and the North End Plan, NICTD proposed an alternative option to the CSX alignment, which consisted of staying within the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street “corridor.” This option proposed to upgrade the tracks to a state that reflects the typical operating conditions and characteristics found on other portions of the line between Chicago and South Bend. This would also provide the ability to implement Positive Train Control, which the Federal Railroad Administration has mandated for all railroads in the U.S. by 2015. This, however, would entail the acquisition and demolition of numerous homes along the corridor, as well as necessitate numerous at-grade street crossings through Michigan City.

In 2008, Sirota, in collaboration with a team of economic development consultants, was retained by the Michigan City North End Action Team (MCNEAT), a coalition of local business and community leaders, to assess and quantify the economic impacts of moving the South Shore Line to either the CSX alignment, keeping it in the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, or moving it north to the Amtrak alignment.

The study concluded that moving the South Shore Line to the CSX alignment would create few, if any, TOD opportunities in the North End and could potentially harm downtown revitalization efforts. Conversely, the study also found that retaining the South Shore Line in its current corridor and enhancing the service, or moving it north to the Amtrak right of way could yield significant economic benefits, in terms of TOD opportunities and downtown revitalization.

The report also recognized that while the Amtrak corridor provided the highest level of opportunity of any option for TOD, due to its close proximity to Lake Michigan and greater availability of underutilized land, the obstacles were also significantly greater than the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> street corridor, in terms of railroad operations and construction costs.

## **The Public Workshop**

Shortly after the consultant report was issued, NICTD released a statement stating its desire to move forward with detailed planning and engineering for South Shore Line improvements to the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor. This included articles in the local Michigan City newspaper which showed a conceptual plan of the proposed route. The articles indicated that numerous properties would need to be acquired and property owners would need to be relocated, but did not provide specifics. This created concern among residents and property

owners, particularly those within or adjacent to the proposed route who would be affected.

In order to foster better communication between NICTD and Michigan City citizens regarding this issue, The City of Michigan City retained TND Planning Group to facilitate a public workshop to begin a dialogue about the potential South Shore Line improvements. The workshop was held at City Hall on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009, and attended by approximately 150 citizens and broadcast on the local cable access channel.

The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

1. Generally, to begin dialogue between the City, residents, and NICTD regarding South Shore Line improvements in Michigan City;
2. Provide an opportunity for NICTD to come before the public to explain the need for making changes in the South Shore Line in Michigan City;
3. Provide an opportunity for NICTD to describe the proposed changes, explain why they believe the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is the best option versus other options;
4. Provide an opportunity for Michigan City residents, property owners, business owners, and other stakeholders, to ask questions, voice concerns, and offer suggestions and ideas regarding the proposed South Shore Line changes or other alternatives.

The first part of the workshop, held in the Council chambers, consisted of presentations by Councilman Richard Murphy, who introduced the process and the facilitator; Sirota, who provided background to the audience on efforts to date, in order to bring everyone “up to speed”, and on the objectives of the workshop; and John Parsons, Marketing Manager of NICTD, who provided details on NICTD’s proposal and rationale for the improvements.

At the outset, Sirota explained that the workshop was just the beginning of a long process, but a first important step in ensuring that Michigan City residents are fully engaged in the process. He explained that now was the time to get all questions and comments out in full public view, and to end speculation and rumors. He also made it clear that this was not the time to answer questions, but that as many questions as possible would be answered as part of the next step in the process. He also cautioned that some questions would not be able to be answered until more detailed study and analysis was completed.

The second part of the workshop consisted of participants moving to a large meeting room where tables with maps and large sheets of paper and markers were provided. Participants were asked to call out whatever issues that they wanted to discuss and break out into groups around tables to discuss the issue that most interested them. Participants were encouraged to draw directly on maps and write on sheets of paper to express their ideas, comments, and concerns.

The final part of the workshop consisted of representatives from each group “reporting” back to all participants about what they discussed at each group so that everyone present could benefit by hearing the outcomes of the discussions. After all groups had reported back, Sirota asked participants to add any further questions or comments that had not been brought up. Those questions and comments were written down on large sheets of paper on flip charts by Sirota’s assistants.

After the workshop concluded, all materials were collected and sent to TND Planning Group offices in Baltimore for synthesis. The results of that synthesis are provided in the following sections of this report. It includes all the questions that were compiled during the workshop or from other sources prior to the workshop, along with answers to the questions, whenever possible. Any questions that could not be answered were identified as such, along with a description of what needed to occur in order for them to be answered. Following the questions and answers is a list of all comments received by workshop participants during the breakout session, organized by issue.

## **II. Results of the Workshop**

### **Part A. Questions and Answers**

The questions presented in this section represent all those asked by residents and other stakeholders prior to and during the workshop. The answers are provided by a combination of sources including the City of Michigan City, NICTD, and the consultant, TND Planning Group.

#### **General questions regarding the justification for the project and the process**

##### **Q: What improvements and/or changes is NICTD proposing for the South Shore Line service through Michigan City?**

A: NICTD is proposing to discontinue running the South Shore commuter service with tracks embedded in asphalt down the middle of 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets, and rebuild the tracks with ballast and tie in a new right of way immediately to the south of 11<sup>th</sup> Street and along a straight line west of Chicago Ave. that would gradually reconnect with its mainline near Sheridan Ave. This would entail acquiring numerous properties along the south side of 11<sup>th</sup> Street and in other select locations in order to create the new right of way. It would also entail closing the existing downtown station stop on 11<sup>th</sup> Street as well as the Carroll Avenue station stop, and constructing a new downtown station near Franklin Street with enhanced passenger and amenities and expanded parking. The exact location of the station has not yet been determined, and

will be the subject of further planning and engineering study. Numerous grade crossings are also proposed to be permanently closed. The exact number and locations of these are yet to be determined and will also be the subject of detailed planning and engineering studies in the coming months.

**Q: Why is NICTD proposing this project?**

A: NICTD is proposing to upgrade the South Shore for numerous reasons including the following:

- It will enhance safety and comply with the Federal Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, which requires Positive Train Control (PTC) systems for Class I freight and passenger rail carriers by December 31, 2015.
- Reduce the number of grade crossings to enable faster operating speeds, while creating a safer environment
- Eliminate parallel moves with auto/truck traffic
- Improve service and reduce travel time
- Enhance access with a major new station that:
  - Enables floor level boarding
  - Consolidates passenger stations w/ full handicapped accessibility
  - Increases parking
  - Improve amenities: restrooms, ticketing, waiting area
  - Incorporates intermodal connections
- Reduce long term maintenance costs for track, signal and overhead power systems.
- Build a structurally sound, electrically adequate and maintainable overhead electrical contact system.
- Enhance system capacity

**Q: What is Positive Train Control?**

A: “Positive Train Control”, or PTC, is a system designed to prevent train-to-train collisions, over-speed derailments, incursions into established work zone limits, and the movement of a train through a switch left in the wrong position.

**Q: Could Positive Train Control be achieved using the existing tracks on 11<sup>th</sup> Street?**

A: No. Positive Train Control is a satellite based collision avoidance system that would utilize the South Shore signal system as the wayside signal component. The South Shore signal system cannot maintain reliability with track circuits embedded in asphalt thru Michigan City, in part, due to environmental

conditions. This would be particularly problematic during the winter when de-icing is applied to the streets, causing signal “shunting” which creates a false notification of a train being present when there is no train in the circuit.

**Q: Why does NICTD feel that staying in the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor is the best option?**

A: Several options have been considered by NICTD including relocating the South Shore Line to the CSX line, approximately one mile to the south of its current location. This remains a viable option if the City and NICTD cannot reach agreement on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor

In addition, the Andrews University Charrette in September 2007 highlighted the importance of keeping the South Shore Line in the North End of Michigan City as part of an economic development strategy that leverage transit oriented development (TOD) opportunities. While this was not NICTD's primary reason for deciding to stay in the 11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, it was an important factor that made the 11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor more attractive.

Finally, NICTD has consistently maintained that relocating the South Shore Line to the Amtrak alignment (also referred to as the “Northern Route”) is not feasible for numerous reasons. Those reasons are detailed on page 18 - 20.

**Q: What Federal regulations govern the matter of railroad grade crossings?**

A: The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulates the aspects of grade crossing safety pertaining specifically to the railroads: track safety, train-activated warning devices, and train safety and conspicuity. For example, the Agency's regulations specify the type of lighting to be placed on a locomotive, the audibility of the train horns, and the inspection, testing, and maintenance standards for active grade crossing signal system safety. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) oversees the issue as it pertains to roads.

**Q: Will Federal money be available to fund the proposed improvements?**

A: NICTD is considering applying for Federal funds from two sources: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Rail Line Relocation and Improvement Capital Grant Program; and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts earmark process. If Federal funding is obtained, a non-federal matching share is typically required. The non-federal share will vary depending on the source of funding.

In addition, The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) gives about \$220

million per year to state Departments of Transportation (allocated according to a complex formula) for railroad crossing issues. State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) then decide which projects to fund. States must maintain a running list of priority projects. However, the 11<sup>th</sup> Street South Shore improvement project is not currently on that list.

**Q: What does the planning process entail and how will the public be involved in the process?**

A: When NICTD applies for Federal funding, they will be required to go through a rigorous planning process which will include either an Environment Impact Analysis (EIS) or an Environmental Assessment (EA) as part of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Process. These can be multi-year studies that entail detailed analysis of feasible options and required mitigation. Preliminary Engineering (PE) is generally carried out concurrently with these studies in order to provide sound engineering basis for any environmental related issues and proposed mitigation measures. Public involvement is also required during this process in order to keep stakeholders informed of findings as well to receive input and feedback.

NICTD is committed to working with the City of Michigan City on a cost-effective realignment design that meets its objectives and addresses the concerns of the community. The initial public workshop initiated by Michigan City in July is not part of the required Federal process, but rather a proactive first step in starting a dialogue with citizens and other stakeholders. The City is committed to ensuring that its citizens are fully engaged and an integral part of the process.

**Q: What are we trying to stimulate – business, commuters, tourism, or all of the above?**

A: The impetus for NICTD making the proposed improvements are for improving and enhancing railroad operations, safety, and compliance. However, the City of Michigan City recognizes that there is an opportunity to leverage the South Shore Line improvements in such a way that can lead to new economic development and revitalization, particularly in the North End. This is based on a strategy of pursuing Transit Oriented Development (TOD), as highlighted by the 2007 North End Plan done by Andrews University. Revitalization of the North End can lead to an influx of new residents, businesses, jobs, and tourism, which will benefit all residents of Michigan City.

**Q: Would Amtrak trains be able to use the new 11<sup>th</sup> Street route?**

A: There is the potential for Amtrak to shift its operations to the new South Shore alignment, however, to date, there have been no formal discussions, let alone a plan or agreement to do so.

**Q: What, if any, is the hard dollar cost to the city of Michigan City for this project? Is the City expected to contribute cash towards funding this project?**

A: The city may contribute local funds to help accelerate the design phase of the project and/or to fund alternatives identified in the preliminary engineering- environmental studies. For example the city may elect to fund the construction of a parking deck to reduce the number of properties that need to be acquired. As the project is designed, funding sources will be identified. At this point in time the city has no financial commitment to the project.

**Q: Are there “soft” dollar costs that the City would have to absorbed (e.g. repaving, moving water/sewer lines, etc.) or are these costs anticipated to be funded as part of the project?**

A: If utility relocations are required, those costs will be included in the overall project costs. The reconstruction of Tenth and Eleventh Streets, are also expected to be included in the overall project. If not, the city would pursue federal highway funding to rebuild the streets without the rails. These grants require a twenty percent local match. However the city presently pays 100% of those paving costs.

**Q: Mayor Oberlie has previously said that five Amtrak crossings in the area would be closed for High-Speed Rail – which five?**

A: Neither the mayor nor Amtrak has projected rail crossing closings as part of a high speed corridor. The city and Amtrak are however in negotiations to open a new crossing at Lake Avenue. Amtrak’s negotiation position is that the city will need to close three crossing. One crossing would be Center Street since the Lake Avenue project is intended as a replacement. The city does not believe two additional crossing can be closed, but negotiations are continuing.

### **10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor - land acquisition/property owner relocation**

**Q: What properties have been identified for acquisition in preliminary studies?**

A: So far, NICTD has identified a conceptual corridor. No properties have been officially identified as part of the preliminary concept plan. Specific parcels would be inventoried as part of the engineering and environmental work that would be undertaken once NICTD receives an endorsement from the City on staying within the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> St. Corridor.

**Q: What is the timeline on property acquisitions?**

A: No properties can be acquired until the preliminary engineering and environmental assessments are completed. The timeline would depend on when NICTD would receive funding to help pay for these studies in order to qualify this project for property acquisition and construction funding. NICTD would like to be well into construction before 2015.

**Q: Will properties be maintained during redevelopment process?**

A: Owners will continue to maintain their properties. Once the properties are purchased and vacated, NICTD would move to demolish the structures as quickly as possible. The vacant land would be maintained by NICTD.

**Q: What is the policy on relocating existing residents?**

A: Since federal funds will be utilized, occupants (renters, owners, whether resident and business) are entitled to relocation assistance as defined in the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970.

**Q: Who will bear re-location costs?**

A: Relocation costs will be an expense built into the grants.

**Q: How will taken properties be valued for compensation (both taxable and tax-exempt properties)?**

A: Acquisition procedures require professional appraisals. In the case of commercial properties three values are established, market, replacement and income.

**Q: What are the specific rights of owners of properties to be taken, and of adjacent property owners?**

A: During the design and environmental phase public forums will be conducted.

In the acquisition phase, the owner may accompany the appraiser when the property is inspected to determine value, may retain their own appraiser.

**Q: How will commercial properties be valued – will land value, revenues and gross profits be accounted for?**

A: Acquisition procedures require professional appraisals. In the case of commercial properties three values are established, market, replacement and income.

**Q: How will homeowners get loans to buy another house?**

A: Acquisition and relocation assistance is currently defined by a federal policy. In addition to the sales price, the owner may receive payments for such items as: to maintain an existing mortgage structure, purchase a home with more bedrooms to accommodate the family based on federal standards, moving expenses, down payment assistance etc . However each acquisition is unique due to varying family size and family incomes.

**Q: What will happen to the water, sewer, and other underground lines serving demolished properties?**

A: Pursuant to city policy when properties are demolished, sewers are plugged to prevent ground water from entering the sanitary sewer. Water lines will be shut off at the valve.

**Q: Can homeowners strip valuables (fixtures, cabinets, etc.) out of their homes?**

A: As a result of the acquisition negotiation, fixtures (including landscaping items) can be removed by the home owner if identified in the sales agreement. Once the property is authorized for demolition, salvage rights to the contents pass to the demolition contractor.

**Q: Can people live in their homes between acquisition and demolition?**

A: Occupancy would be established as part of the acquisition agreement. A resident is not expected to be out of the property until the day of the closing.

**Q: Will NICTD need or want to take more property later on, after NICTD plan is implemented?**

A: NICTD does not anticipate acquiring additional property at this time.

**Q: What are NICTD's Eminent Domain powers, in relation to those of the City?**

A: As a municipal corporation NICTD has the power of eminent domain as set forth in Statute IC 8-5-15-15. This is identical to the eminent domain powers of the City of Michigan City. Full details on this statute can be found at [www.in.gov/legislative/ic/code/title8/ar5/ch15.html](http://www.in.gov/legislative/ic/code/title8/ar5/ch15.html).

**Q: Will the City be compensated for the property lost off of the tax rolls, and is this incorporated into the shared "soft" costs, if any?**

A: There will not be a net loss of property tax revenues. Whenever a property or properties are removed from the tax rolls, the city-wide tax levy is adjusted by law to compensate for the potential loss of revenue, and that amount is redistributed to all existing properties in the City. Moreover, the improvements to the South Shore Line and potential new investment from TOD and other redevelopment leveraged from the improvements will result in a net increase in tax revenue over time.

**Q: Is Federal Stimulus money available for this project?**

A: There may be Stimulus money available to help fund this project, but this will depend on many factors, including political support and project timing.

**10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor – street closures / fencing / neighborhood impacts**

**Q: What impact will the NICTD proposal have on properties adjacent to tracks and/or parking in terms of noise, crime, increased traffic, vibration of passing trains, etc.**

A: NICTD and the City have agreed to work together to make the corridor attractive. NICTD has stated that this project could be a model for station development and corridor aesthetics. NICTD has shared photographs with the News-Dispatch of the corridor near the Glenview Metra commuter rail station as an illustration of a positive model. Designing the 10th/11th Street corridor to be attractive and aesthetically pleasing will maximize opportunities for enhancing public safety, property values, and other socio-economic factors.

Other elements such as traffic and vibration will be fully studied as part of the corridor design during the planning and engineering process to ensure that potential negative impacts will be mitigated.

**Q: What landscape and streetscape improvements will be included in the project design?**

A: The City and NICTD are committed to working together to design the relocated South Shore Line that enhances the community. Specific landscape and streetscape improvements will be developed during the planning and engineering phases of the project. Public input will be solicited in helping to develop those improvements.

**Q: Who will maintain streetscape improvements – lighting, fencing, etc.?**

A: NICTD will maintain improvements on their property while the City will maintain improvements on City property.

**Q: Will freight trains be allowed to run on the new alignment?**

A: Yes, much as they do on 11<sup>th</sup> Street today, the South Shore Freight Line would continue to operate on the new tracks.

**Q: Will vibrations harm houses?**

A: No greater risk than what exists today. This element would be one of many studied during the environmental process.

**Q: How much faster and/or frequently will trains (both passenger and freight) operate on the new right of way than today in their present configuration on 11<sup>th</sup> Street?**

A: Except for slower speeds in curves the preliminary engineering analysis indicates that passenger trains would be able to travel up to 50-60 mph on straight track. However, depending on the location of the station actual passenger train speeds will be slower as they approach and leave the station. Freight trains would be limited to 25 mph. Train frequencies could increase for passenger and freight service.

**Q: Will money be available to maintain houses prior to demolition so that blighted conditions are not created during the transition period.**

A: Owners will be expected to maintain their structures until the property

is sold to NICTD. NICTD will proceed to demolish the buildings as soon as possible to prevent a blighted appearance.

**Q: Can't NICTD just add a 2nd track to 11<sup>th</sup> Street without taking any homes?**

A: No. 11<sup>th</sup> Street is not wide enough to add a 2<sup>nd</sup> track, and even if it was, numerous operational and maintenance issues would still remain that would make it undesirable to continue service within 11<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition, it would also not be feasible to turn 11<sup>th</sup> Street into a "train only" right of way, while maintaining residences and other properties along 11<sup>th</sup> Street. This would prevent vehicular access to those properties.

**Q: Would there be major "bumps" at rail crossings?**

A: Track geometry depends on the final alignment and the location of grade crossings. After the new alignment and tracks are constructed, all remaining grade crossings should be "flush" with the pavement where the tracks cross, to allow smooth vehicular crossings, just like at any typical railroad crossing.

**Q: Would fencing be continuous along route, or will there be breaks in fence for crossings?**

A: Fencing is primarily a safety feature to reduce the chances of pedestrians, especially children from straying on the tracks. While the exact location of fencing will be determined during later planning and engineering phases, fencing is primarily used in areas where residences are in close proximity to tracks. While there will certainly be breaks in fences at vehicular grade crossings, further study is needed to determine if and where at-grade pedestrian/bicycle crossings can be maintained where at-grade street crossings are closed. The potential for grade-separated pedestrian/bicycle crossings ("grade-separated" means overpasses or underpasses) will also be studied.

**Q: Will emergency and service vehicles have access to 11<sup>th</sup> Street?**

A: Vehicular traffic would be maintained on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, which would include emergency and service vehicles.

**Q: What kind of signaling would be used at rail crossings?**

A: NICTD's objective would be to install gates, bells, and flashers at all remaining grade crossings.

**Q: How much time would be saved by closing certain intersections and how much benefit (time savings) will come from the cost of closing intersections?**

A: Safety, not time savings, is the primary reason for grade crossing closures. In addition, by having higher operating speeds, grade crossing warning devices would actually be activated for a shorter period of time.

### **10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor - transit-oriented development (TOD) / station design/ parking**

**Q: What type of station and parking is proposed to be built?**

A: A major new station with full amenities is contemplated. It would include a large fully enclosed waiting area with rest rooms, ticket vending and possibly food services. The station would include high level (floor level) ADA compliant platform that would speed boarding and alighting. The station would need to accommodate passengers from both Carroll Ave. and 11<sup>th</sup> Street Street stations with the potential to park 800 cars.

**Q: What is the estimated number of new visitors, full-time residents and new housing units to be created?**

A: The estimated number of new households and residents, as well as increased tourism created by TOD could vary widely based upon different market conditions. The TOD economic impact study done by consultants looked at a potential TOD scenario that included approximately 650 new housing units within walking distance of the new South Shore Line Station near Franklin Street.

**Q: Can the Greyhound station be moved, or at least connected to South Shore Line and Amtrak?**

A: NICTD is interested in making the new train station a multi-modal station, which would make it a convenient transfer hub between the South Shore Line, local buses, and other transit services. The potential for Greyhound and other inter-city bus lines to serve the new station, as well as connector shuttles to the Amtrak station, will be explored during the planning process.

**Q: Will revenues offset costs of acquisition and development?**

A: The potential exists for the new South Shore station to catalyze a great deal of reinvestment in the North End, particularly new residential development that could in turn lead to new businesses and employment. This in turn would lead to increased tax revenues for the City. The economic impact study demonstrated that these benefits would likely far exceed the costs within a short time horizon.

**Q: Who will be the developer?**

A: The City is just beginning to explore TOD strategies for the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor, thus no property has been assembled nor has any developer been selected to redevelop any properties in this area. That said, there is always the possibility that a developer can step forward to propose a TOD project in the vicinity of the proposed station if and when market conditions become favorable to do so.

**Q: Who will build and have financial responsibility for the parking facility? How much capacity will facility have? Will there be room for expansion?**

A: NICTD has initially proposed a large surface parking lot, which could be between 500 and 800 spaces. The City has expressed concern about a surface parking lot, and the Andrews University North End Charrette Plan emphasized utilizing structured parking “wrapped” by new development in order to create appealing streetscapes. NICTD and the City will need to engage in a negotiation process to determine if and how structured parking will be funded, constructed, and operated.

**10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street route - historic preservation**

**Q: Is there a plan for the former South Shore station building?**

A: The former station building is now privately owned and there are currently no plans to incorporate it into the proposed station design. However, the Andrews University North End Plan envisioned the station building façade as the centerpiece of a full block redevelopment that would include a new station building, new infill development, and a parking structure. NICTD could potentially study this option further during preliminary engineering.

**Alternative realignment options**

**Q: Is the “Northern Route”, which follows most or all of the existing**

## **Amtrak alignment, feasible from an engineering standpoint and from a NICTD business plan perspective?**

This depends on who you ask. NICTD has consistently been opposed to a Northern Route for the following reasons:

- Maintaining the existing at-grade swing bridge is unacceptable:
  - Sharing trackage with Amtrak – dispatching and trackage use issues. Amtrak will always insist on priority. Cannot overemphasize this fundamental operations problem and its long term implications.
  - Failure of swing bridge over Trail Creek would cause major service disruption
  - Impact to SouthShore storage and switching operations at Carroll Ave. and Lincoln Yard. Doesn't include the very substantial costs for replacing these assets.
  - Difficulty installing and maintaining overhead electrical contact system on movable structure.
  - Accelerated deterioration of metal superstructure due to electrolysis resulting from electrical train propulsion.
  
- Building a new fixed span bridge – bridge estimate alone at least \$230M\* (Andrews University estimate in 2007 North End Plan):
  - Amtrak issues remain
  - Navigable waterway may require bridge 45' above Trail Creek
  - 1.4% grade would require approximately 8,100' of elevated grade from 8<sup>th</sup> Street (along Nickel Plate) west to the vicinity of Lincoln Yard
  - Structure would need to be designed to accommodate unit coal trains.
  - Station would be elevated requiring tangent and level track west of Trail Creek further affecting elevated run-out and costs.
  - Would add ½ mile to our existing track miles, adding travel time to and from points east.
  - Cost of bridge doesn't include the very substantial costs of replacing SouthShore yards at Carroll and Lincoln.
  - Massive station development proposal with costs of at least \$30-50 million
  - Elevated station access requires elevators, escalators and long-term increased maintenance costs of elevated bridge and station.
  - Single track structure precludes use of floor level passenger boarding due to freight clearance issues.
  - Accelerated deterioration of metal superstructure due to electrolysis resulting from electrical train propulsion.
  - Lacks double track potential for future expansion of South Shore.

However, there are a number of Northern Route advocates in Michigan City who disagree with NICTD's assessment and believe that these issues can be mitigated and overcome. Resolution of these differences should be pursued through constructive dialogue in order to reach consensus and move the process forward.

**Q: How would an elevated Northern Route impact the North End?**

A: NICTD and the City believe that an elevated structure would create a visual "barrier" to Lake Michigan, while the North End Plan showed a scheme whereby an elevated structure could be integrated into the North End through clever urban design and high quality architecture details. From an operational standpoint, an elevated structure would pose numerous problems for NICTD as detailed in the previous answer.

**Q: Would a new bridge over Trail Creek have to be 45 feet tall?**

A: When US12 was reconstructed the bridge was constructed with a 46' clearance over Trail Creek. NICTD has no reason to believe that the US Coast Guard or Michigan City Port Authority would accept a lesser clearance than US12.

## **Part B. Comments and Suggestions from Workshop Attendees**

### **General comments**

- Uncertainty and delays in the process can lead to creation of blighted areas while stakeholders debate.
- Improving the South Shore Service will enhance Michigan City's relationship with South Bend
- Scheduling and reliability issues prohibit maximum usage of the line by commuters; no matter what happens with the route, express trains should be added to schedule.
- Michigan City used to be a tourist destination and should be again. A revitalized South Shore Line in Michigan City will help achieve that goal.
- Create a free shuttle service to connect 11<sup>th</sup> Street Station to Amtrak Station, beach, casino, and mall.
- Find a way to connect Greyhound Bus service to the South Shore Line.
- Encourage visitors to take the South Shore Line to Michigan City, walk around downtown area and on to beach or casino.
- Don't abandon the south side of the city – make it easy to get to.
- Closing the Carroll Avenue station will have negative economic impact on the east side of town.
- Create bike paths in conjunction with the South Shore Line Improvements, connecting various destinations.
- Library should be moved and building demolished, then re-connect Franklin Street and revert it to a two-way street.
- Decide route first, then work out details.
- The vast majority of the workshop attendees have strong opinions about whether the South Shore Line should remain as is versus upgrade within 10th/11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor versus be relocated to a northern route.

## **10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor – street closures / neighborhood impacts / historic preservation**

- The rail and street design must comply with historic district ordinances – no chain link fences.
- Employ historic, low-hanging street lights.
- There needs to be an effort to identify and preserve historic structures within the project area, including old station.
- The former South Shore station should be renovated and incorporated into the plan for a new station.
- Redevelopment must comply with historic district ordinances.
- Make the streetscapes pedestrian-friendly.
- Close 11<sup>th</sup> Street to car traffic and straighten two major curves, then widen 10<sup>th</sup> Street to accommodate current 11<sup>th</sup> Street traffic. This would lessen property takings and impact.
- Need to make rail crossings attractive.
- Road closings that create dead-ends will harm safety, security, and traffic flow.
- This project is an opportunity to add value to neighborhoods.
- The NICTD plan would harm the area around Green Street on the west side.
- Don't want ugly grade crossings like in Gary.
- Move tracks to one side of 11<sup>th</sup> Street, with two-way traffic on other side.

## **10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor - transit-oriented development (TOD) and station design**

- TOD should raise property values, increase tax base, bring in new residents and investment, and turn MC into a destination.

- Encourage walkable, mixed-use development.
- Possible uses for revitalized commercial space: Clothing, book stores, coffee shops, bistros, Blues & Jazz club, medical center, sidewalk seating and dining.
- Find a way to include park space in the design of the South Shore Line upgrade.
- Focus on quality development – enforce codes and high standards for design.
- Make the new station historically and architecturally compatible with existing districts
- Build a vertical parking garage instead of surface lot – it will limit takings and increase the amount of land available for development
- Use low-maintenance materials like brick.

### **Other realignment / station options**

- Put a station on Michigan Blvd. at Chrysler dealership.
- North route – the previous study shows that the Northern Route has the most capacity for economic development
- Do an in-depth study of a grade-level Northern Route that stays south and west of Trail Creek and goes under bridges. This would eliminate the need for an expensive new bridge.
- Northern Route would result in the fewest disruptions of people’s homes.
- Northern Route “shows the city more” – casino, waterfront, zoo, boats, etc.
- There are several possible locations for new station – Wabash St. and by Pioneer Lumber Co.
- Routing the train along Green Street would minimize housing takings
- Train could run on US-35 with a new station on hospital property, or northeast of Spring and Route 35
- Northern Route could have impact on wildlife in the northeast green space

area.

- Northern route would harm Krueger neighborhood.

### **III. Recommended Next Steps**

As mentioned, the July workshop marked the start of the public process. While this workshop was not required, it was a proactive step taken by the City and NICTD to engage the public in what will be an ongoing dialogue. It is very important that the process be open and “transparent”, so that citizens have the best and most current information along the way, and have a meaningful voice in shaping the best possible outcome.

Once NICTD secures funding to proceed with detailed planning and engineering studies, environmental impacts to both the natural and built will be analyzed. This process will require periodic public meetings to keep residents and affected property owners informed, and provide further opportunities for public input at certain milestones during project planning and engineering.

However, the level of public involvement required by law is inadequate and typically provides stakeholders with only a token say in the process. In order to fully engage the public, a more robust public process should continue, building on what was started with the July workshop. This could yield significant benefits, not only for the community, but for NICTD as well. By working with the public as a “partner”, greater buy-in and support of the project can be achieved. This can actually help accelerate the process by reducing opposition and delays, potentially leading to project funding more quickly.

The following recommendations for next steps will ensure that the public is fully engaged and that the process moves forward in an open, transparent manner:

#### **1. Form a Community Advisory Council (CAC) for the South Shore Line relocation.**

As planning and engineering commences in the coming months, a CAC should

be formed that works closely with NICTD and the City on the South Shore Line relocation project. This group should consist of civic and business leaders, as well as a representative sample of property owners. The City Planning Department should help facilitate this group and provide resources as necessary. The CAC would meet with NICTD regularly to discuss and work through issues and items as the planning and engineering process moves forward. Keeping the CAC apprised throughout the process will help maintain a continuous dialogue. The CAC should keep the City Council and residents informed of their activities through regular updates and forums. This would be beneficial to NICTD by having the CAC act as a community liaison and outreach resource.

## **2. Aid the public in visualizing the potential changes in the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, and help them shape/communicate preferred design scenarios.**

The initial workshop was the first step in helping to correct misinformation, dispel rumors, build trust, and even allowing the community to “vent.” It also highlighted the fact that there is still concern, fear, and skepticism about various alternatives. This is perfectly reasonable and expected. The proposed changes that NICTD seeks will dramatically alter the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> street corridor from what it is today. It is difficult for most residents to visualize what the changes will look like or how they will affect their quality of life, in any but a negative way. This is particularly evident in other places where NICTD has upgraded service, most notably through Gary. NICTD has expressed confidence that the changes can be accomplished in a way that will enhance Michigan City and the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, but many remain skeptical. To help visualize what an attractive corridor could look like, NICTD recently shared photographs along the railroad near the Glenview Metra commuter rail station as a positive model.

In order to work through this issue, a follow up workshop should be conducted that focuses on helping residents visualize what the changes would look like. This would help reduce fear, but also help identify issues and develop solutions. Computer renderings and models could be developed “on the fly” during the workshop to demonstrate how good design could be utilized. Input on design elements from citizens could be interactively for discussion and be used to communicate preferred design scenarios. The results of this workshop could provide guidance to NICTD by incorporating them into their planning and engineering efforts early on.

## **3. Work towards broad-based consensus on the preferred location.**

While NICTD has provided a robust rationale for why the “northern” Amtrak route is not a viable option for the South Shore Line, there are local advocates of that option who are garnering much attention with their efforts and counter-arguments. These opposing viewpoints have kept a broad-based consensus

on South Shore Line relocation options at bay. Many Michigan City residents and leaders seem unsure of which is the right option. It would be “healthier” to the process, if consensus could be reached, rather than have ongoing disputes about two fundamentally different approaches that could potentially “derail” the process.

A facilitated “Northern Route Summit” should be considered to be held in the near future, bringing together officials from NICTD, The City, and Northern Route advocates, in order to have a comprehensive dialogue about the issues. This would provide an opportunity to discuss all viewpoints directly among the parties, and potentially reach consensus. If consensus is reached, this can be communicated to the public at large, which will help reach closure on the issue. If consensus is not reached during the summit, it will still help bring greater clarity to the broader constituency about the trade-offs of each option. The summit is not envisioned as a public event, but videotaping the event and broadcasting it at a later date on the local cable station is recommended.

