



BUILD INDIANA COUNCIL

Infrastructure Media Summary

February 20, 2018

Fewer riders but not fewer tax dollars: Can Transpo find more customers?

South Bend Tribune
Jeff Parrott
2/18/18

As it launches a search for its next leader, the public bus system has suffered steeper ridership declines than others across Indiana and the nation in recent years, according to a Tribune analysis of public records. Of the seven comparably sized systems in Indiana — those that average more than 1 million miles a year — only Transpo saw ridership declines in each of the past four consecutive years for which data was available, from 2013 to 2016. The numbers come from Indiana Department of Transportation annual reports. Transpo's ridership also saw the steepest decline over that time, falling 24 percent, exceeding Muncie's 17 percent, Evansville's 13 percent, Fort Wayne's 11 percent, Lafayette's 9 percent, and Indianapolis' 7 percent. Of the seven comparable Indiana systems, only Bloomington's ridership increased, rising 1.5 percent. At the same time, Transpo's nearly \$10 million annual budget, which comes from a roughly consistent mix of local, state and federal taxes, has declined by only 3 percent during that time. Transpo's property tax revenue actually grew by 3 percent, from \$3.46 million in 2012 to \$3.56 million in 2016, at a time when St. Joseph County officials face a state mandate to curb property tax growth. Transpo is well aware of its ridership declines and plans later this year to embark on a strategic plan aimed at addressing them as it searches for a new CEO, said Amy Hill, its marketing director who is serving as interim CEO and general manager until the board hires a permanent replacement. The previous CEO, David Cangany, was fired in December. "The bottom line is we're still operating the same amount of service regardless of the number of riders," Hill said. "That's why looking at going forward, what can we do to make sure we are fully optimizing all those routes? What changes can we make? Are there areas that need service that don't have service?" https://www.southbendtribune.com/news/local/fewer-riders-but-not-fewer-tax-dollars-can-transpo-find/article_9e62e012-a1d1-52ca-be5d-ccd2d207941c.html

County hopes new gas tax revenue boosts highway maintenance

The Herald Republican
Mike Marturello
2/16/18

ANGOLA — Steuben County Highway was looking at a relatively ho-hum year when it comes to road maintenance and upgrades this year. At least on paper. The county is budgeted at spending \$430,000 from a budget that has been appropriated for 2018. This comes on the heels of a few years in which spending was at or near levels desired by the highway department and what could be realized in 2019 and beyond once the county starts spending its collection of the new Local Option Highway User Tax money. However, money from last year's state hike in the gasoline tax should come into play in 2018.

"I'm optimistic with the funding mechanisms available ... that we can move forward," said Jen Sharkey, Steuben County Highway engineer. Sharkey estimates the bump from the 10-cent state gas tax increase will generate about \$800,000 for Steuben County. "I'm targeting \$800,000. That's what I'm hoping," Sharkey said. That would put the maintenance fund in the \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million range, assuming the Steuben County Council appropriates the money for use this year. "We're hoping it won't be a sleeper year. We've been working with the auditor's office to identify the 10-cent increase in the gas tax that went into effect July 1," Sharkey said. Once it is determined how much money has been collected, Sharkey said she plans to approach the County Council for an additional appropriation to use the money this year. Distribution is nearly two months in arrears. That means the county has probably received about six months of increased gas tax money from the legislation passed in 2017 by the General Assembly and signed by Gov. Eric Holcomb.

http://www.kpcnews.com/news/latest/heraldrepublican/article_a5013ae8-4832-5d89-b4e4-e5fa0335e927.html

Porter County's decades of dreaming leads to study of extending Willowcreek Road south

NWI Times

Bob Kasarda

2/15/18

VALPARAISO — Decades of discussion and dreaming came to a head Thursday afternoon when the Porter County Board of Commissioners took the first step toward extending Willowcreek Road south from its current ending point at County Road 700 North. The commissioners agreed to apply with the Indiana Department of Transportation to study potential routes of extending the roadway initially to Ind. 130. "It's a study of where it will go," Commissioner Jeff Good, R-Center, said. The study will suggest possible routes and the environmental and financial impacts of each, County Attorney Scott McClure said. The proposed study does not yet have a price tag because firms have not yet been chosen to carry out the work, he said. The study, like the project itself, would be funded 80 percent with federal dollars with the balance picked up locally. The proposed route would amount to 1.5 to 2 miles, Good said. While the many preceding years of discussion have focused on extending Willowcreek Road another six miles to U.S. 30, Good said this beginning stretch is more manageable and the time was right to act. "Since federal funds are available for the study, it would be irresponsible for us not to go after them," Good said.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/porter/porter-county-s-decades-of-dreaming-leads-to-study-of/article_b2384bec-90c3-5786-b13f-51f370dfb4c8.html

Regional planners visit D.C. at 'auspicious time'

NWI Times

Andrew Steele

2/15/18

PORTAGE — Several representatives of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission who attended a National Association of Regional Councils conference this week found themselves in the nation's capital just as policy proposals potentially impacting the commission's future were made public. Monday, the first full-day of the National Conference of Regions, saw the White House announce its infrastructure plan and its fiscal year 2019 budget proposal. "It was a very auspicious time to be in Washington, D.C.," NIRPC Executive Director Ty Warner said. "Everybody's still processing the ramifications of what that all means," Warner said, noting the funding source for the \$200 billion infrastructure plan hasn't been identified, and that a president's budget proposal typically doesn't resemble a final budget. "These are the launches of conversations," Warner said. "Nobody sees these as being a final product." The Trump administration's budget proposal zeros-out the Capital Investment Grant program that would help fund the South Shore Line's West Lake Corridor and Double Track projects, but Warner said meetings with several members of the area's congressional delegation showed they remain

united in preserving it. And while the infrastructure plan has raised some concern, with its call for higher local contributions to major projects, "it's not a replacement for the current funding mechanisms," Warner said. "Its intention is to help the backlog of projects." But stability in current funding mechanisms, mainly in the programs contained in the 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, is a significant concern of the National Association of Regional Councils, Warner said. http://www.nwitimes.com/business/local/regional-planners-visit-d-c-at-auspicious-time/article_46cd7e17-ba29-5513-b76b-2c48fa9ab4a3.html

www.buildindianacouncil.org