

Chapter 4

Economic Development and Rail Infrastructure: A Symbiotic Relationship

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ABSTRACT

“Public transit” is a term usually associated with urban life. The term “commuter” is usually associated to suburban dwellers. One envisions rural dwellers as farmers, far from urban areas. Those who live in Northwest Indiana enjoy urban, suburban, and rural life, with easy access to the second largest city in the United States, Chicago. Access to a major metropolitan area allows inhabitants of Northwest Indiana to earn an income that is commiserate to an urban lifestyle, but with options of lower-cost housing, utilities, and amenities offered in suburban and rural communities.

INTRODUCTION

“Public transit” is a term usually associated with urban life. The term “Commuter” is usually associated to suburban dwellers. One envisions rural dwellers as farmers, far from urban areas. Those who live in Northwest Indiana enjoy urban, suburban, and rural life, with easy access to the second largest city in the United States, Chicago. Access to a major metropolitan area allows inhabitants of Northwest Indiana to earn an income that is commiserate to an urban lifestyle, but with options of lower-cost housing, utilities, and amenities.

Public transit is a means for any of these communities—urban, suburban and rural—to join other travelers in transiting distances together. Moving out of the comfort of one’s own means of transportation; an automobile, to join in public transit is foreign to many rural dwellers. Suburban workers, who use public transit to access Chicago-based employment, use public transit for work, but continue to use their personal automobiles for all other transit needs (except air travel). Where suburban and rural dwellers shop and live is affected by access to public transit and personal automobiles.

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Albeit there is opportunity in easy access to Chicago, Northwest Indiana inhabitants fear change of their controlled, comfortable communities by approving more public transit in Northwest Indiana. Public transit affords easy access to employment in urban areas for commuters in suburban areas, but also allows for access to suburban communities for those without personal automobiles in more urban areas. There is fear that development around public transit will be solely focused on the disenfranchised. Transit development should be planned for the community's benefit. All members of the community, those with and without means, should be able to take advantage of public transit opportunities; those that come from the transportation opportunity to Chicago as well as those opportunities that come from community development around the transit stations.

As a resident of Munster, Indiana, a commuter on Northwest Indiana Commuter Transit District (NICTD) and an employee of Metra; the commuter transit agency for the Chicago metropolitan area, I am very interested in the impact of NICTD's proposed extension to Southern Munster, Indiana. This extension of service will allow me to be close enough to the most southern station that I will be able to walk or ride my bike to access public transit. I welcome the positive developmental effect of being able to ride my bike to the station.

Access to public transit allows for businesses to spring up around the access points. Businesses that are planned to provide services and meet the needs of the public who ride the transit. I am excited about the opportunities that Munster will be afforded in this new transit line, but there are those who are vehemently against public transit in Munster.

I see the future of Munster as progressive; Munster is becoming a hub for commuters from further southern suburbs and rural areas. There are many businesses and services already along the proposed route of the new NICTD extension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are various success factors in transit-oriented development identified as part of achieving transit implementation success (Thomas & Bertolini, 2017). Transit-Oriented Developments can help off-set infrastructure costs by paying development costs up front, off-set capital construction costs and provide housing capital development near transit. Transit oriented development starts before the transit project can provide a tax base to help finance transit development (Fleissig, 2011). Several sections of our text provide information of development's impact on infrastructure and financing options based on public/private partnerships. Chapter 17, New Tools for Managing Infrastructure and the Environment provides particular insights that impact the Munster/Dyer station proposed for the NICTD extension (Grigg, 2010).

Transit Development is being funded by many levels of government. Large capital plans were discussed by various agencies per news articles that include several rail related projects, such as positive train control and the West Lake Corridor which ends in Munster/Dyer, Indiana. The funding provides for State of Good Repair money, as well as for other improvements, that are slated to improve transit in Northwest Indiana (Steele, 2018). Joint development projects, using both public and private investments, can be successful depending on the method of implementation, the region and use. Joint development in transit-oriented development can provide for efficient use of public funds and efficacy of land use (Zhao, Vardhan, & Larson, 2012).

The effect of physical design of transit-oriented development is crucial to coordinating intense land uses and multiple transit models (Jacobson, Justin, & Forsyth, 2008). Land use affects public transit.

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