

INTRODUCTION

The 2040 Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study (NATS) Long Range Transportation Plan will explain how the communities in the planning area will address their transportation needs, what their priorities include, and how federal, state, and local dollars will be used to address highway, transit, airport, bikeway, and pedestrian walkway infrastructure needs.

This plan provides guidance to the area's local officials as they plan for the present and future development of their communities. The plan contains the planning framework and other necessary information to assist sound decision-making for the improvement of local transportation systems. It is revised every four years to maintain a consistent, twenty-five year look at the issues and needs of the NATS Urban Area. The Plan will also reference other local or regional agency plans as part of the NATS region's effort to coordinate community-wide multi-modal services.

There are two primary reasons to develop a comprehensive transportation plan.



The Chapin House in the City of Niles and former city hall until 2012.

1. The 3 Cs of Transportation Planning: Cooperative, Continuing, and Comprehensive

Decisions are better when the decision makers, working in cooperation, have as much information as possible, and base their policy choices on a comprehensive analysis. Although the process of gathering information for analysis is always beneficial, it becomes even more important when investment decisions are expensive and the consequences long-lasting. Such is the case in transportation system infrastructure improvements; a great deal of money is spent on various transportation system improvements such as adding lanes to roads, repaving or reconstruction, or building pedestrian/bicycle facilities. These are expensive projects but are necessary to the economic and social life of a community.

2. Federally-Mandated Transportation Planning Process for Urbanized Areas

NATS was established in 1973, following federal guidelines dictating that urban areas of a prescribed population density and an expectation of urban development must plan their transportation infrastructure together. The MPO is charged with maintaining a continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning process to accommodate the federal obligation. At a minimum, the jurisdictions within the defined planning boundaries shall collaborate to set regional priorities for all modes of movement in the transportation system and determine their formula for producing the local, non-federal match required for federal assistance in planning and transportation-related activities.

STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

Berrien County

Berrien County is located in Michigan's southwest corner. The southern border of the County abuts Indiana's northern state line. The cities in the southern portion of the County are strongly influenced by the population and economics of the Indiana cities that lie in close proximity including South Bend, Mishawaka, and Michigan City. Chicago is also a powerful influence on many aspects of life in southwest Michigan. The strong links between Chicago and Berrien County include economic, environmental (both are within the Lake Michigan Watershed Basin), social, as well as transportation. A few towns in the far southwest portion of the County are even within the farthest reaches of the Chicago commuter shed. It is widely accepted that a Chicago "Mega-Region" includes Berrien County. Berrien County comprises a total area of 580 square miles and is bordered by Michigan's Cass County to the east and Van Buren County to the north and Indiana's LaPorte and St. Joseph Counties to the south. The western edge of the County comprises a portion of Michigan's Lake Michigan western "sunset" coastline. All told, Berrien County contains 42 miles of Lake Coastline.

Cass County

Cass County is the first county to the east of Berrien in Michigan's southwest corner. The southern border of the County abuts Indiana's northern state line. The cities in the southern portion of the County are strongly influenced by the population and economics of the Indiana cities that lie in close proximity including South Bend, Mishawaka, and Michigan City. Chicago is also a powerful influence on many aspects of life in southwest Michigan. Cass County comprises a total area of 508 square miles and is bordered by Michigan's Berrien County to the west, Van Buren County to the north, and Indiana's St. Joseph and Elkhart Counties to the south.

MPO STUDY AREA

The Niles-Buchanan-Cass Area Transportation Study (NATS) is the Michigan portion of the South Bend, Indiana, urbanized area as designated by the United States Census. The NATS area is defined by an area that includes communities in both Berrien and Cass Counties. The 2010 Census changed the urbanized area for the NATS study area. The change has occurred within Cass County. Mason Township will become the newest member to the NATS committees. A discussion of the committees can be found on page 15 of this planning document.

The current jurisdictions within the study area which include: Cities of: Niles, Buchanan, Village of Edwardsburg, Townships: Bertrand, Buchanan, Howard, Mason, Milton, Niles Charter, and Ontwa.

Map 1 - MPO Study Area



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The Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) service area shares the northern Indiana border with Berrien and Cass Counties. The NATS study area is the Michigan piece of the South Bend, Indiana, urbanized area as designated by the United States Census. Coordination of transportation projects and planning documents are coordinated with the transportation staff at MACOG. www.macog.com/.

GOVERNANCE OF THE MPO

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Governing Board

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) is one of 14 Regional Planning and Development Regions created in 1968 by Governor George Romney. This step was taken in response to a growing number of federal programs (housing, water quality, economic development, and transportation) that recognized the area-wide nature of many problems. The regional boundaries were established as a consistent geographic area upon which not only planning activities, but also the delivery of services could be based. Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties were established as "Planning and Development Region IV." The full history of the SWMPC can be viewed at <http://www.swmpc.org/history.asp>. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) provides the staff for the MPO.



The SWMPC Governing Board reviews and affirms decisions of the NATS MPO Policy Committee. The SWMPC Governing Board reviews and approves the following documents that are produced by the MPO staff:

1. **Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP)**-which covers a twenty-five year period and is revised every four years.
2. **Unified Planning Work Program (UWP)**-describes the planning work to be accomplished in the fiscal year.
3. **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** - a four-year document which prioritizes all transportation improvement projects in the four-year period.
4. **Public Participation Plan (PPP)** - documents the standard expectations and procedures for public involvement in this region's transportation planning process.

In addition, the MPO may produce other documents, policies, or initiatives that may be determined to advance the efficient and effective use and development of the regional transportation system. In these instances, the SWMPC Governing Board is not obligated to review and affirm these decisions.

The MPO Committees

The MPO has two Committees which oversee and direct the MPO staff on a variety of topics, such as meeting preparation, public outreach, and document preparation. The two committees are the Technical Advisory Committee and the Policy Committee.

NATS Technical Advisory Committee

The NATS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is comprised of planners, transit operators, engineers, managers, and operators of transportation agencies, local units of government, the MDOT, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and provides technical assistance to the MPO staff on transportation issues. They make recommendations to the Policy Committee on potential actions. Current representatives from the following agencies make up the membership of the Committee:

TAC Committee Members:

* Non-Voting member

Berrien County Community Development
Berrien County Road Commission
Bertrand Township
Buchanan Dial-A-Ride
Buchanan Township
Cass County Planning Commission
Cass County Road Commission Engineer
City of Buchanan
City of Niles Community Development
*Federal Highway Administration - Michigan Division
Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce
*Federal Transit Administration
Howard Township
Michiana Area Council of Governments
Milton Township

*Michigan Department of Environmental Quality- Air
Quality Division
*Michigan Department of Transportation - Multi-
Modal Division
Michigan Department of Transportation - Southwest
Region
Michigan Department of Transportation Statewide
Planning Division
Michigan Department of Transportation-
Transportation Service Center, Coloma
* Michigan Department of Transportation - Travel
Demand
Niles Charter Township
Niles Dial-A-Ride
Ontwa Township
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians
Southwest MI Economic Growth Alliance
*Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
Village of Edwardsburg

NATS Policy Committee

The NATS Policy Committee is composed of elected officials of local government, board members of transportation-related agencies, and designated officials from the MDOT, the FHWA, and the FTA. These officials are responsible for establishing local transportation policies, overseeing the planning process, and providing a forum for cooperative decision-making. The Policy Committee provides technical advice through the expertise of the TAC. Current representatives from the following agencies make up the membership of the Committee:

Policy Committee Members

*** Non-Voting member**

Berrien County Community Development

Berrien County Road Commission

Bertrand Township

Buchanan Dial-A-Ride

Buchanan Township

Cass County Planning Commission

Cass County Road Commission Engineer

City of Buchanan

City of Niles, (3 representatives)

*Federal Highway Administration - Michigan Division

Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce (2)

*Federal Transit Administration

Howard Township

Michiana Area Council of Governments

Milton Township

*Michigan Department of Environmental Quality- Air Quality Division

*Michigan Department of Transportation - Multi-Modal Division

Michigan Department of Transportation - Southwest Region

Michigan Department of Transportation Statewide Planning Division

Michigan Department of Transportation, Transportation Service Center, Coloma

*Michigan Department of Transportation - Travel Demand

Niles Charter Township

Niles Dial-A-Ride

Ontwa Township

Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians

Southwest MI Econ. Growth Alliance

*Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Village of Edwardsburg

Bi-State Coordinating Committee

The Bi-State (Michigan/Indiana) Coordinating Committee consists of representatives from the Niles and South Bend areas. Its function is to ensure the coordination of regionally significant activities across the state line and to resolve conflicts as they arise. Current membership is as follows:

Table 1 - Bi-State Coordinating Committee

Michigan		Indiana
Commissioner, Berrien County		Commissioner, Elkhart County
Commissioner, Cass County		Commissioner, St. Joseph County
Mayor, City of Niles		Mayor, City of Elkhart
Supervisor, Bertrand Township		Mayor, City of Mishawaka
Supervisor, Howard Township		Mayor, City of South Bend
Supervisor, Milton Township		Councilman, City of Elkhart
Supervisor, Niles Charter Township		
Supervisor, Buchanan Township		
Supervisor, Ontwa Township		
<u>Ex Officio</u>		
Michigan Department of Transportation		
Indiana Department of Transportation		
Federal Officials (as necessary)		

LEGISLATION

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) (49 USC Chapter 53) constitutes the governing rules for transportation planning and decision making. New concepts and requirements originate from this legislation and therefore the MPO will be held responsible for implementing the changes. MAP-21 was signed into law by President Barack Obama on July 6, 2012. MAP-21 is a 27 month authorization that ends on September 30, 2014. MAP-21 continues the MPO and statewide transportation planning process established in previous federal transportation legislation. Some notable changes include the following:

- **Restructuring of Core Program-under MAP-21 (there are 5 program areas)**
 1. National Highway Performance Program
 2. Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program
 3. Surface Transportation Program
 4. Highway Safety Improvement Program
 5. Metropolitan Planning

- **Programs Eliminated**
 1. National Scenic Byways
 2. Transportation Enhancements
 3. Transportation, Community and System Preservation
 4. High Risk Rural Road Program
 5. Safe Routes to School
 6. Job Access Reverse Commute
 7. Railway-Highway Crossing Hazard Elimination in High Speed Rail Corridors
- **Performance Based Planning**-Continues the 3C process (continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive) and establishes and uses a performance based approach to decision making.
- **National Highway Performance Program**-Supports the National Highway system by reviewing the condition and performance of the system, makes progress toward performance goals, and tracks new facility construction.
- **Transportation Alternatives**-Consolidates Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School and Recreation Trails Programs. It can also fund environmental mitigation and minor road construction. MPOs must run a competitive process for this funding source.
- **Transit**-Formula grant programs include urban areas, rural areas, elderly and disabled, bus and bus facilities, state of good repair and high density.
- **National Freight Policy**-Establishment of a national freight policy of mainly highway assets and creates a national freight network designated by critical rural freight corridors.
- **Environmental Streamlining Processes**- It is in the national interest to expedite delivery of surface transportation projects by substantially reducing the average length of the environmental review process.

A summary of MAP-21 can be found by visiting:

FHWA <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/summaryinfo.cfm>

FTA http://www.fta.dot.gov/legislation_law/about_FTA_14937.html

HISTORY OF THE STUDY AREA

Berrien County

Rene' de LaSalle arrived in Berrien County in 1679 and built Fort Miami at the mouth of the St. Joseph River. This would become the base for many explorations into the Mississippi River Valley. Toward the end of the Seventeenth Century, subsequent French explorers built Fort St. Joseph farther up the river at the present site of the City of Niles, Michigan. The County officially organized in 1831 and was named after U.S. Attorney General John M. Berrien. At that point, the County saw population increases during the 1830s. In 1834, settlers started to take advantage of the moderating affect of Lake Michigan on Berrien County's climate and of its sandy soils, which provided a perfect environment for agriculture, including a breadth of fruits and vegetables. Berrien County's fruit production continued to grow as did its population.



Fort St. Joseph Museum in Niles, MI

Fort St. Joseph - Niles

French explorers built Fort St. Joseph around the end of the seventeenth century, upriver from the mouth of the St. Joseph River at what is now the City of Niles. Fort St. Joseph was heavily utilized until the French left the area around 1763; the British then held the fort until it was captured by the Spanish in 1781. This international history provided Niles with the distinction of being a town of four flags. The original site of the fort is marked by a huge boulder with an historical marker that recounts the history of the fort. Today the history of the Fort is told at the Fort St. Joseph Museum. The Museum has many outstanding exhibits highlighting the Fort's unique history.

Cass County

Cass County was named after Lewis Cass who was the territorial governor of Michigan from 1813 to 1831. Early settlers came from the west, using Niles and Berrien County as the doorway to the east. Those early settlers included New Englanders, Southerners, and a large African-American and Native American population. The Potawatomi Indians had been long-time residents of Cass County prior to the arrival of white and African-American settlers. The Potawatomi were gradually forced off their land. Some Native Americans resisted and in 1837 were able to purchase 1,000 acres of land in Silver Creek Township. Descendants of the Potawatomi still make their homes in Silver Creek Township today.

An Indian trail that crossed the state from Detroit in the east to Chicago in the west is now the US-12 Heritage Trail. The trail had historically linked animal migratory habitat, Native American territory, first generation settlements, commerce routes, and cultural corridors.

The African-American story is particularly rich in Cass County. The county was a haven for many African-Americans migrating north during the mid-nineteenth century. Their migration was aided by Quakers who had also left the South because of their opposition to slavery. The Quakers helped slaves escape through the Underground Railroad, the route ran about two miles east of Cassopolis. The primary station for the Underground Railroad route in Cass County is the William Jones House.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING: HOW WE GOT HERE

- The increased usage of automobiles in the early 1900s was what first sparked the coordinated planning of motorized highways and the transportation system more broadly.
- The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1927, the introduction of national roadway standards and funding allotments in the 1920s the Act allowed highway construction to begin connecting the nation's population centers.
- In 1941-1945, highway expansion stopped and transit system ridership reached an all-time high. Streetcars, rail systems, and buses served as significant means of travel for Americans. The post-war period saw a huge demand for new vehicles and space for homes as soldiers came home.
- The Federal-Aid Highway Acts of 1944 and 1956 significantly increased funds for road building. Bolstered by housing policies that promoted a move to the suburbs, automobile-oriented planning came to dominate American transportation.
- Planners began using tools to make their study of transportation more relevant, such as travel studies, and forecasting for future travel patterns. In addition, organizations such as the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Professionals (AASHTO) published manuals on conducting cost-benefit analysis of transportation projects. Planners and engineers coordinated with business leaders to use transportation planning as a tool not just to move people, but to encourage economic development in target areas.
- The 1960s saw a balanced highway and transit investments approach. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962 mandated a continuous planning process that brings together stakeholders from the federal government, the state, and local communities to update transportation plans. The Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964 was the first federal effort to encouraging the planning and area-wide mass transportation systems. These two Acts placed an emphasis on coordinating regional transportation planning with land use and taking into account the environmental and social costs that highway and transit projects impose on communities. It was during this time period, that the framework for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) came into being.
- The start of the new millennium has reinvigorated regional transportation system planning with a new focus on multi-modalism and less emphasis on private automobile infrastructure. Even with this new focus however, private automobiles continue to dominate transportation planning. Mounting concerns about the impacts of the automobile on climate change and air quality, as well

as an aging national population have led transportation planners to renew their focus on balancing automobile infrastructure with planning for transit and non-motorized facilities. As U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood said in 2010, “This is the end of favoring motorized transportation at the expense of non-motorized.”¹ This new call for a system that supports all modes and all abilities is particularly timely for the southwest Michigan region, where an aging, diffuse population requires a diverse array of transportation options.

CURRENT TRANSPORTATION ASSETS

Roadways

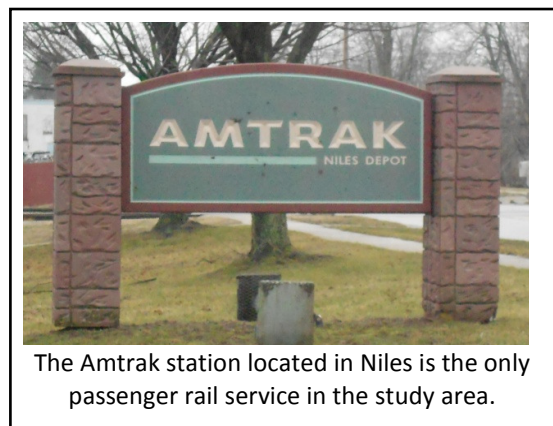
As of 2013, Berrien County has 749 miles of federal-aid eligible roads. In particular, Interstate 94 plays a prominent role in connecting Berrien County to the rest of Michigan and the nation. I-94 connects Berrien County with Detroit and Ontario, Canada to the east, and Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison, and Minneapolis-St. Paul to the west. I-196 also vectors north from I-94 and connects the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph area with Holland and Grand Rapids. In addition, US-31 is a divided highway that directly connects Berrien County to South Bend. US-12 provides an east-west connection across the state in the southern portion of Berrien and Cass counties. M-139, M-63, and Red Arrow Highway serve as north-south connectors and business corridors in the Berrien County. More detailed information about roadways can be found in the Intermodal Considerations section of the plan.

As of 2013, Cass County has 373.1 miles of federal-aid eligible roads. There are no Interstates that run through the county but there are several Michigan highways that provide connections within and outside of the County. M-40 and M-51 serve as the north-south connectors while M-60 and M-62 serve as the west-east connectors. US-12 provides an east-west connection across the state in the southern portion of the County.

Rail

Amtrak has two corridor passenger services in the NATS region including the Wolverine, and the Blue Water that focus on providing rail service between Detroit, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois.

- **The Wolverine** passenger service is a 304 mile line that offers three daily round trips from Chicago, Illinois to Pontiac, Michigan, with a stop in Niles, Michigan. The Wolverine operates over tracks



¹ Vestel, Leora Broydo. “Transportation Department Embraces Bikes, and Business Groups Cry Foul.” *The New York Times*. March 26, 2010. <<http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/26/transportation-department-embraces-bikes-and-business-groups-cry-foul/>>.

owned by Norfolk Southern Railway, Amtrak, Conrail, and Canadian National Railway.

- **The Blue Water** is the second service that makes a daily stop in Niles, Michigan, from Chicago, Illinois to Port Huron, Michigan. The Blue Water operates on a 319-mile line that includes sections owned by Norfolk Southern Railway, Amtrak, and Grand Trunk Western Railroad. The 97-mile segment between Porter, Indiana and Kalamazoo, Michigan, is the longest segment of track owned by Amtrak outside of the northeast corridor.

In addition, the South Shore Line provides commuter service to Chicago, with fourteen daily departures from Michigan City and seven from South Bend. Each of these departure points is just a few miles from the Michigan-Indiana state line. More details about rail service can be found in the **Intermodal Considerations** section of the plan.

Transit

The NATS planning area is served by 3 transit agencies consisting of Berrien Bus (county-wide system), Buchanan Dial a Ride (serving the City of Buchanan and Buchanan Township), and Niles Dial a Ride (serving the City of Niles and Niles Charter Township). Cass County only has one transit provider within the study area and that is the Cass County Public Transit Authority. More details about transit service can be found in the Intermodal Considerations section of the plan.

Non-Motorized Facilities

NATS supports major regional efforts to improve facilities for non-motorized transportation and trails. NATS is part of the MDOT Southwest Region 9-County Non-Motorized Plan, which set out a 9 county regional vision of what the non-motorized transportation system in southwest Michigan should be. In addition, jurisdictions within NATS are closely linked to the ever expanding system within the MACOG area. More information about non-motorized facilities can be found in the Intermodal Considerations section of the plan.

Aviation

Southwest Michigan Regional Airport is the only public airport in Berrien County and is located in Benton Harbor. The airport has runways capable of handling jets. The airport handles executive travel, air courier, the Coast Guard, and some freight activity. In 2011, the airport completed safety upgrades to further lengthen the runways and accommodate more aircraft. The other airport is the Jerry Tyler Memorial Airport, owned and operated by the City of Niles. The airport services as a general utility airport with no commercial flight operations. More information about aviation facilities can be found in the Intermodal Considerations section of the plan.