

RURAL AND URBAN PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Although there are many facets of the transportation networks, some may produce more significant impacts than others. Listed below are present and expected situations, the potential effects of which deserve special attention. Recognizing that transportation needs do not occur independently of land use, the NATS committees have identified a list of community concerns that have a direct impact on the area's transportation network.

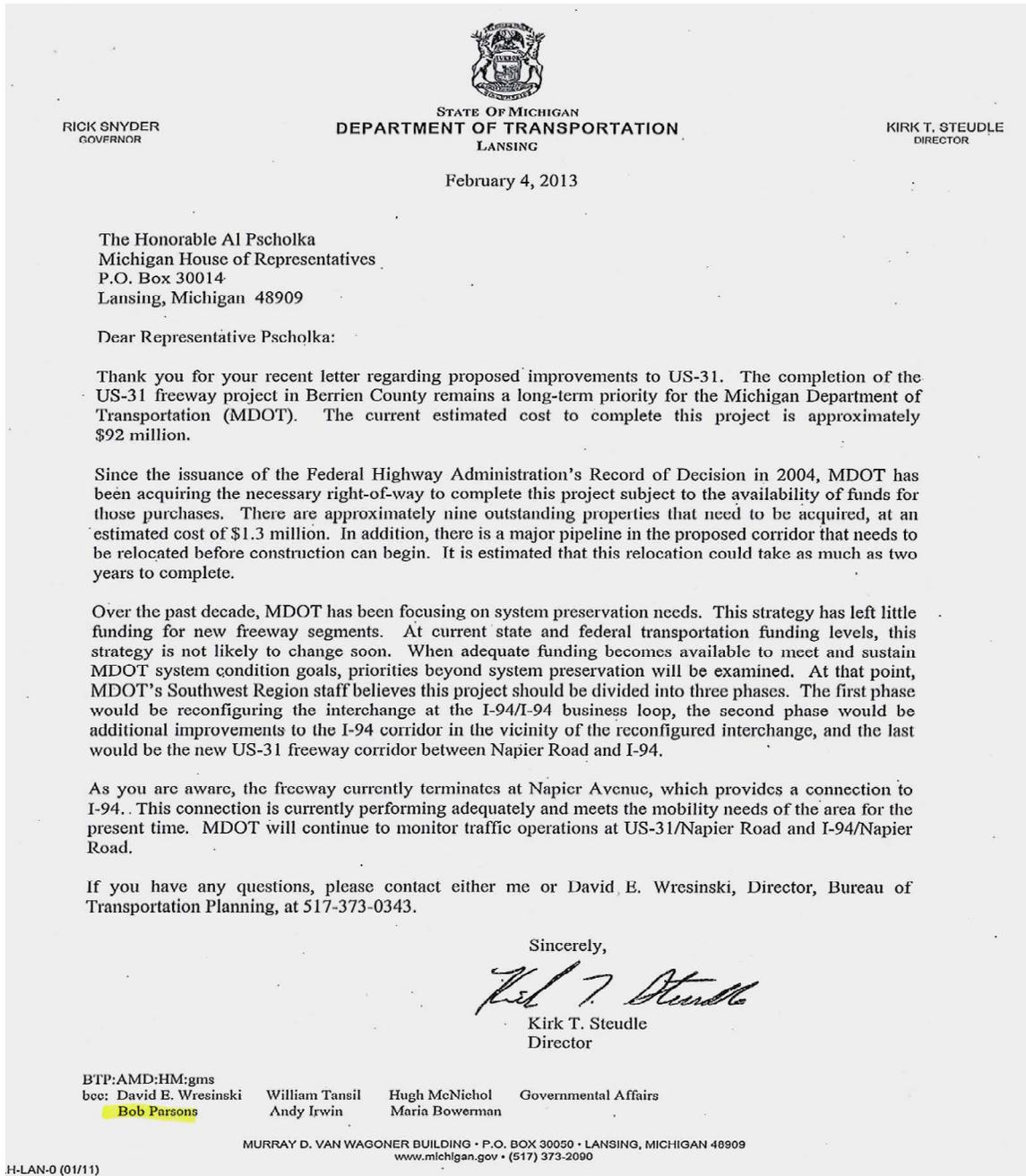
BERRIEN COUNTY

- **Harbor Shores** - During the 2009 TwinCATS LRTP update, construction was underway on the Harbor Shores golf course in Benton Harbor. The cities of St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, as well as Benton Charter Township, came together to partner with Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment, Inc. to develop and redevelop over 530 acres of land along the Paw Paw and St. Joseph Rivers near Lake Michigan. The \$500 million, multi-year project is slated in the end to bring over 826 residential units, over 43,000 square feet of commercial and office space, two hotels, a conference center, a water park, and a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course into the TwinCATS area. The golf course is currently open and hosted the Senior PGA championship in 2012 for the first time.

The next major phase of development within the Harbor Shores project is known as Harbor Village at Harbor Shores. Harbor Village includes a hotel, condominiums, cottages, and a marina on the north bank of the St. Joseph River. Construction is expected to begin in the spring of 2013. The Environmental Assessment for the Harbor Village project, released in January 2013, found that no further roadway capacity expansion would be needed for the project, and that existing roadways are adequate for traffic coming to and leaving from Harbor Village. The assessment found that any significant new adverse air quality impacts from transportation would come during the construction process only, which was acceptable under EPA standards. In terms of transit connections, the project was well within Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority (TCATA)'s door-to-door service area and was also within an acceptable walking distance to TCATA's fixed route service. The project will also improve upon local trails by continuing to build the 12.2 mile non-motorized path system outlined in the Harbor Shores Master Plan. In particular, a non-motorized path on public property adjacent to the Harbor Village development will be developed in conjunction with the private development, improving pedestrian and bicycle access along the St. Joseph River, all through ADA-accessible facilities.

The significance of this project to the region is unmistakable. Significant land use changes are taking place on previously vacant land, new residents will purchase second homes in the area, and many visitors will use the hotels, golf course, and marina, along with other businesses and services in Benton Harbor and St. Joseph. As the development continues to progress, regular updates will be provided at TwinCATS TAC committee meetings to review transportation impacts.

- US-31** - The completion of the US 31 freeway from Napier Avenue to the I-94 and I-196 interchange is a project that has been important to the people of southwest Michigan for over 30 years. In a recent correspondence dated February 4, 2013 from MDOT Director Kirk Steudle to State Representative Al Pscholka indicated that “the US-31 freeway project in Berrien County remains a long-term priority for the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). The current estimated cost to complete this project is approximately \$92 million dollars”. A copy of the letter has been included in this section. It is clear that the completion of this highway is important to the local agencies of southwest Michigan but also to MDOT.

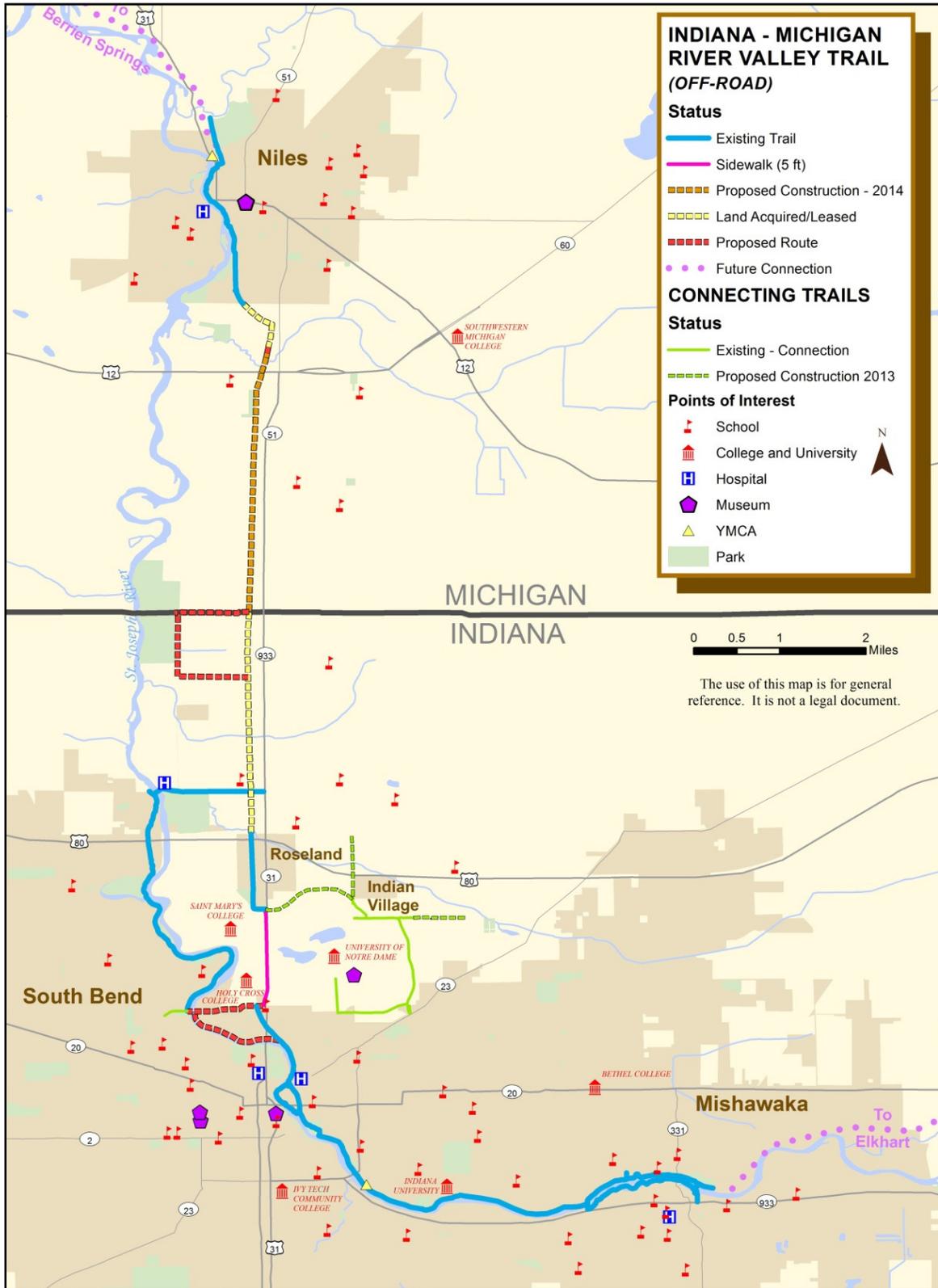


- **Berrien County Equestrian Centers** - A specialization is being seen throughout Berrien County in the form of expo centers. One such example that must be mentioned is the Expo Arena at the Berrien County Youth Fair <http://www.expoarena.org/>. The arena will include a 500-stall stable and will feature an indoor warm-up ring, a 4,000-seat show area that can be converted to 7,000 seats for concerts and a hospitality center with a 14,000-square-foot exhibition hall. Also included will be 18 classroom/sky boxes, locker and tack rooms and a 400- by 75-foot concourse for offices, shops and vendors. The marketing study estimated the arena could draw as many as 10,000 visitors for 39 weekends each year. Not only would those venues include horse shows and rodeos but also concerts, livestock, trade, boating and RV shows. Conventions, wedding receptions, proms, circuses and farm-implement, pet and house and garden shows also could be accommodated. There are other examples of these types of facilities located in Niles, the Lucky Horse Equestrian Center (71487 Kline Road, Niles) and the Concord Ridge Equestrian Center located on M-139 in between St. Joseph and Berrien Springs.
- **Southeast Berrien County Landfill (on Chamberlain Road)** - One of the issues at this facility is that three different jurisdictions have ownership of different parts of Chamberlain Road. Those communities are: Buchanan Township, Bertrand Township, and Niles Charter Township. Niles Charter Township has ownership of the east side of the road; Bertrand Township has ownership of the west side of the road, and Buchanan Township has ownership at the entrance to the facility.
- **Niles Industrial Park**- The Niles Industrial Park is located in the City of Niles near the Jerry Tyler Airport off of Lake Street. Improving the routes connecting to the Industrial Park and making access to the major highways is a key to the success of the businesses located there.
- **11th Street Corridor Improvement**-The Corridor Improvement Plan anticipates the future development of the 4.5 miles of the 11th Street (Michigan Highway 51) corridor through a series of development options and action plans. The project would focus on the corridor from Main Street to Stateline Road. The roadway has several unique challenges including ownership by the Michigan Department of Transportation. However, local land use planning and zoning is done by the City of Niles and Niles Charter Township. The partners that were involved in this plan wanted to review the roadway for its potential and what could be achieved through coordination. The plan analyzes several elements of the corridor:
 - Streets and Traffic Patterns
 - Driveway Access
 - Pedestrian Circulation
 - Aesthetics and Maintenance
 - Parking
 - Building and Public Spaces
 - Land Use
 - Sense of Place

The plan discusses how the implementation of the project could be handled. The recommendation discussed was to form the creation of a new inter-governmental body capable of both raising the necessary funds and providing of the construction and maintenance of corridor improvements. The plan emphasizes the importance of intergovernmental coordination with master planning and local zoning issues.

- **Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail-** The Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail partners are working to create a 34-mile trail connecting Niles, Michigan to Mishawaka, Indiana. The completed trail would be used by commuters, students, families, and tourists. The trail would connect people to four universities and schools, four downtowns (Niles, Roseland, South Bend and Mishawaka), sixteen parks and two YMCAs, five hospitals or major medical facilities, historical and cultural attractions, and businesses offering eating, lodging and shopping. In 2013 the trail project was awarded funding from MDOT Transportation Enhancement, Transportation Alternatives funds, Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, to begin the engineering and then construction of the trail. This project will be a tremendous asset to the community and region.

Map 21 - Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail



CASS COUNTY

- **Traffic on the existing north-south routes** including, but not limited to, Gumwood, Fir, M-62/SR 23, and Ironwood, moving to and from the University Park Mall, individual strip malls and mega stores in the Mishawaka area (Indiana). These roadways provide the key connectors into Indiana and do not completely traverse the county. Roadways such as Dailey Road, Calvin Center, and Indian Lake Road do provide some of the longest north south extensions in the County; however they end at major highways and do not return to a county road. Some of the roadways turn to highways.
- **Four Winds Casino**-Is located on a 59-acre plot of land off the west side of M-51 near Edwards Street near Dowagiac, Michigan. The casino is projected to employ 100 people. While this project is located outside of the MPO this could impact the traffic patterns going south on M-51 into the MPO area.
- **Southwestern Michigan College**-SMC continues to construct year-round dorms for students. According to Jason Wilt, Director of Housing for SMC, in the Fall 2013 SMC will open their third student residential hall which will add 130 more private bedrooms to the current 260 student housing community. While this facility may be outside the MPO, as people from Cass County orient themselves toward the South Bend/Mishawaka area, the travel patterns of these students may also include their shopping and traveling through the MPO.

INDIANA

The Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) handles the transportation planning and coordination of the transportation system in northern Indiana. Please refer to MACOG's LRP for more information <http://www.macog.com/>.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Commercial Traffic** - Any change in the density of population and intensity of land use activities will change the predicted traffic flows and possible congestion in those segments of the network. As employment opportunities spread far from the historic centers of the cities, they put a strain on the existing network. Many of these problems involve land use and development policies, and they often have the greatest affect on the townships. Concerns about population density, access management, and support of arterial routes have become important planning considerations because of increasing residential development pressures. Housing developments on the northern edge of Indiana are encroaching into Michigan through subdivision roads as developers buy and build on land that straddles the boundary between the states.
- **Land Use** - The preservation of open space and of the agriculture industry hinge on property owners' decisions and local implementation of state land use policy. As farmers sell their prime agricultural lands and these lands are developed into more sprawling communities, the strain to local jurisdictions becomes very real. As more and more people live in rural communities, additional infrastructure is

often not put into place to meet the growing diversity of needs by the public. We can see this in the form of people not being able to walk to vital services such as transit, shopping, and medical care facilities.

- **Telecommuting** - As more people and businesses are willing and able to allow their employees to work from home remotely the importance of having the right telecommunications becomes more significant. We have seen a shift already of people living in Michigan while working in Indiana and Chicago from their primary or secondary residence. If we see a greater shift in people needing to physically be in an office, there could be less traffic on our most heavily traveled roadways, thus cutting down on the wear and use of passenger vehicles. This could impact the air quality issues that face southwest Michigan but also the wear on our roadways.