

Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit

Transit Advocacy Toolkit



Transit is a wise, effective investment in the prosperity of Indiana communities. Every day it offers Hoosiers an affordable, convenient and safe transportation choice. Transit takes people to work, school, shopping, medical care and community events. It provides freedom and mobility for individuals and families and offers many people the access they need to be independent.

Despite the seeming complexity of transit policy and funding, ICAT's advocacy message is simple:

- We need more transit service.
- We need more funding for transit.
- We need more local transit funding options.

This toolkit is designed to provide the information and resources you need to educate your fellow Hoosiers and your elected officials on the benefits of improved transit service and the need for more dedicated funding.

Table of Contents

The Case for Transit	Page 3
The Benefits of Transit	Page 4
Transit in Indiana	Page 7
Funding for Transit	Page 8
Get Involved and Take Action	Page 10
Resources	Page 12

The mission of the Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit (ICAT) is to educate on the benefits of transit and advocate for the immediate development and ongoing support of comprehensive transit options in communities across Indiana.

Visit ICAT online at www.indianacat.org; contact us at info@indianacat.org.

This toolkit was completed in June of 2012 with the generous support of the American Public Transportation Association's Local Transit Coalition Grant Program.

The Case for Transit

Public transit creates opportunity, offers access and mobility to those who would not otherwise have it, and provides Hoosiers a transportation option. It is used by those who are “transit-dependent” (whether they don’t have a car, have a disability that limits driving, or don’t drive for other reasons) and by those considered “choice riders” (people who have another transportation option but choose to ride transit because of one or more of the benefits). Transit offers substantial advantages to individuals and communities, which will be discussed further in the next section.

We all benefit from robust transit services, even if we don’t ride ourselves. Transit is vital to our economy and to connecting people with the places they need to go.

Transit:

- gets workers to the places you patronize and rely on for services;
- connects your neighbor’s elderly parent to a social network and shopping;
- lets commuting students in your town avoid the congestion and price of on-campus parking and use the travel time to read and study;
- takes a young mother and child from your place of worship to the medical care they need; and
- allows your colleague’s 15-year-old to work an after-school or summer job.

At one time, transit had a rightful place in the transportation system of many Indiana communities. Unfortunately, over the past five or six decades, we have overemphasized the automobile and dedicated nearly all of our transportation spending to roads and highways designed for car travel only. As a result, we have seen negative impacts to mobility, public health and safety, the environment, neighborhood development and our overall quality of life. Reinvesting in transit systems will help to redefine our communities as more viable places to live, work, learn, shop and play.

There is growing demand for transit in Indiana and around the country. Ridership in many places is at an all-time high. People don’t just want more travel options; they need them. At the same time, transit funding has dwindled to its lowest level in years. Existing transit systems are cutting service or going out of business altogether; few can meet the full demand of users because of funding limitations.

Transit Defined

Transit is any form of transportation that runs fixed or on-demand routes and is available to the public.

The most common forms of transit are buses, trains, subways and ferries.

The terms “transit,” “mass transit,” “public transit” and “public transportation” are often used interchangeably.

Our situation is urgent! We need to be planning expansion and growth for the future, recruiting young and skilled talent to Hoosier cities and towns, and improving our competitiveness in the global market. To do that, we need dedicated transit funding.

Our local, state and federal elected officials must work together on the policy and funding solutions needed so that communities can design, construct, operate and maintain the transit services that meet their needs.

The Benefits of Transit

Transit offers vast benefits to individuals and communities throughout the state.

Transit boosts economic development. It is a wise investment in our community's prosperity, creating jobs, connecting people to them and spurring growth and opportunity.

Transit saves families time and money. By using public transportation, families can avoid congestion and have more of their income to put to other uses.

Transit improves mobility and independence. It gives many individuals who would otherwise be unable to travel around their community the access they need to be active and self-sufficient

Transit enhances public health and safety. The development of transit options in a community decreases traffic crashes and increases opportunities for physical activity. Transit also allows Hoosiers to stay healthy by getting them to medical appointments.

Transit decreases energy consumption while protecting the environment. It decreases automobile use, thereby reducing vehicle pollution and our reliance on foreign oil.

Economic Benefits

- Transit creates jobs through design, engineering, construction, operation and maintenance of transit facilities and vehicles. Indiana's public transit systems directly employ more than 3500 people.
- Nationwide, for every 1 billion dollars invested in public transit, 36,000 jobs are created and supported.
- A family that utilizes public transit can save about \$10,000 dollars annually by living with one less vehicle. When public transportation is utilized, only 9% of the household budget is spent on transportation as opposed to 25% where public transit is not utilized.
- Transit systems spark transit-oriented development. New construction of buildings – offices, commercial, and housing – close to transit stations creates new markets for job growth near transit investment. Properties in close proximity to transit stops have increased property values. Across the nation, neighborhoods with the best access to jobs and public transportation are holding their values more than car-dependent neighborhoods.
- Every \$1 invested in public transportation yields \$4 to \$6 in economic return.
- While sitting in traffic during rush hour, Indianapolis area commuters waste an average of \$506 per year on excess gasoline and lost productivity.

Health, Safety and Quality of Life

- Individuals who regularly take public transportation walk more and most meet the CDC guidelines for the recommended amount of daily moderate exercise; regular physical activity can provide up to a 50% reduction in the risk of developing heart disease, adult diabetes and becoming obese, and a 30% reduction in the risk of developing hypertension.
- Public transit connects people to medical care and healthy, affordable food choices.
- People who have access to public transportation have less financial and commuter-related stress.
- Air pollution, with vehicles being a major contributing factor, is associated with illnesses including asthma, other respiratory conditions, heart disease and cancer.
- Traffic accidents are reduced in areas that have a good public transit system. U.S. traffic fatalities average 43,000 annually with approximately 2.5 million people injured nationally every year.
- In 2010, almost one-third of the passenger trips provided by Indiana's rural and on-demand transit providers were for medical appointments.

Energy and the Environment

- Public transit saves 4.2 billion U.S. gallons of gasoline every year, which is the equivalent of 900,000 "fill-ups" a day
- Public transportation saves 37 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually
- One person switching to public transit can reduce daily carbon emissions by 20 pounds, or more than 4,800 pounds per year; this is equal to a 10 percent reduction in a two-car household's carbon footprint.
- Households near public transit drive an average of 4,400 fewer miles per year.
- The typical transit rider consumes on average half of the oil consumed by an automobile rider.

Improved Mobility, Independence and Equity:

- About one-third of our total population does not drive.
- Only one-half of seniors have access to public transportation to meet their daily needs, and as such, they stay home on any given day.
- Public transportation offers mobility to those with disabilities who would otherwise not be able to get to the places they need to be, such as the doctor, grocery and social events.

- Transportation-disadvantaged populations include large subsets of the America’s low-income and elderly individuals and persons with disabilities. These populations have vastly unmet transportation needs.

These statistics and many more can be found on the following webpages:

American Public Health Association

[Transportation Issues from the Public Health Perspective](#)

[At The Intersection of Public Health And Transportation: Promoting Healthy Transportation Policy](#)

American Public Transportation Association

[Public Transportation Benefits](#)

[Reports and Publications: Energy and the Environment](#)

[Reports and Publications: New Publications](#)

[Public Transportation Facts at a Glance](#)

National Council on Aging

[Advocacy Toolkit: Transportation](#)

Public Transportation Takes Us There

[Benefits](#)

National Association of Realtors®

[Smart Growth Program Transportation Toolkit](#)

Advocacy Tip

It is important to understand that different transit benefits will appeal to different people. You don’t have to “sell” everyone on every argument. Consider which ideas will make the most sense to the individual or group with whom you are communicating.

Transit in Indiana

Despite the limitations of transit funding, the reach and impact of transit service in Indiana is significant.

Existing Service

Indiana currently has 22 urban transit systems and 44 rural systems. The South Shore, operated by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District ([NICTD](#)), is Indiana's only commuter rail line. Additional services within Indiana are provided by [Greyhound](#), [Amtrak](#), several private intercity bus operators, and more than 100 specialized transportation providers. *See a map of Indiana's public transit coverage in Appendix A.*

In 2010, those 66 transit agencies, serving 82 of our 92 counties, provided more than 35 million passenger trips. The vast majority of these trips were provided by fixed-route service and served Hoosiers traveling to and from work. More than 2.5 million were demand-response trips for the elderly and persons with disabilities, providing safe mobility for medical care, shopping, dining and social trips.

Unmet Demand

Even with such ridership numbers, it is widely accepted that there is more demand for transit than there is availability of service. Documentation from 2010 showed that Indiana's rural transit providers denied almost 4000 requested trips, and we understand that to be just a small fraction of the total denials.

A [2008 study required by the Indiana State Legislature and commissioned by INDOT](#) found:

- urban bus and rural transit systems in Indiana are undersized and not meeting potential demand,
- urban systems are not designed to attract choice riders; and
- the current mix of transportation funding does not generate sufficient revenue to accommodate the transit investments needed to meet unmet demand.

In Indiana, just over 1% of people commute to work using public transportation; nationally, that rate is about 5%.

Jobs & Industry

Transit agencies directly employ more than 3500 workers around the state. Thousands of other jobs are indirectly linked. Several Indiana businesses manufacture transit-related supplies and equipment for distribution here and throughout the world. Key industry partners include [Cummins](#), [Allison Transmission](#), and [Steel Dynamics](#).

Annual Reports

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) Office of Transit provides financial and technical assistance and administers funding to agencies throughout the state. Since 1998, INDOT has published an annual report which summarizes key operating and financial characteristics of Indiana's publicly assisted transit systems. They also offer a detailed reporting of system characteristics, a summary of federal and state transportation assistance programs and awards, a listing of partners and advocates, as well as a glossary of terms as used in the report. [View those reports and numerous other INDOT resources here.](#)

Transit Funding

Transit in Indiana is chronically underfunded. Even as demand for public transportation is increasing, traditional funding sources are failing to meet today's needs, let alone support a more transit-ready future. We must have dedicated transit funding!

The details of transit funding can seem very complex and confusing. Most people don't even think about it – they simply care about how much the ride will cost and if it will get them where they need to go in a timely way. The reality is, though, that those factors are directly tied to funding! Understanding how transit is funded, the limitations of the current sources, and the potential policy solutions is key to successful advocacy efforts.

In most places, transit is funded by a combination of four primary sources, which each contribute roughly 25% to the overall budget: federal funds, state funds, local funds, and the “farebox” – the money collected from passengers. Other grants and contributions may also be secured. The mix and balance of these funding sources is an important factor in a transit agency's ability to maximize their return on investment and to stay fiscally solvent.

Transit expenses fall into two broad categories: 1) operations and maintenance, which includes driver and staff salaries and benefits and fuel costs, and 2) capital costs, which includes purchasing buses and trains and building stations. Some funding sources are better suited for (or even limited to) one category of expense.

While it is true that transit does not pay for itself, no form of transportation does. Roads and highways are funded with a mix of federal, state and local tax dollars in just the same way. Furthermore, that investment of public dollars into our transit systems is far from “wasted” money. Every \$1 spent returns \$4 to \$6 to the local economy through jobs and business development.

Here is more information about transit's public funding sources:

Federal Funding

The Federal Transit Administration ([FTA](#)) administers federal funding through two types of programs: formula grants and competitive discretionary awards. Formula funds use a complex methodology that can include population, air quality, and agency operating characteristics. Some programs provide funds for major capital investments and the planning and development of new service. Still others provide funding for service in rural or small communities and for special populations, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities and those with low-income.

Federal funds may have a required local match; it is also fair to say that federal funding authorities prefer to invest in communities with a commitment of strong local support. Additional information about federal transit funding is available from the FTA and in INDOT's annual report (referenced above). The federal transportation authorization bill passed in late June 2012 is expected to result in some changes to transit funding.

State Funding

In 1980, Indiana began collecting revenue for the Public Mass Transportation Fund ([PMTF](#)) using a dedicated share of the state sales and use tax. As the sales tax rate has grown over time, PMTF's share of that rate has been reduced (with some variability), in an attempt to keep fund receipts revenue-neutral. Over that same time, however, the number of transit systems has

increased dramatically, from 18 systems in 1978, to 39 systems in 1997, to the 66 we have today. As a result, the net effect has been a significant reduction in each system's share of PMTF, seriously eroding the impact of the state's investment in public transportation.

Funding through PMTF has averaged about \$42 million per year over the past few years. As a point of reference, INDOT's overall budget for 2010 is about \$2 billion.

Tragically, the 2011 General Assembly eliminated the PMTF, and thus, dedicated state funding for transit. Transit will be just another line item in the overall state budget, one we will be forced to justify and defend every two years. Moving forward, our advocacy work at the statehouse must be focused not just on retaining state funding for transit, but on restoring dedicated funding through the PMTF.

The state has retained three dedicated sources of funding for commuter rail, all of which currently goes to the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) for operation of the South Shore, the only eligible entity.

Local Funding

In Indiana, property taxes are the most common source of transit funding on the local level. However, as you may know, property taxes have been capped in the state constitution. We are just beginning to see the negative impact of this limitation on transit, as well as other public services.

Local option income taxes, for which there are several subcategories, is another potential source for local transit funding. However, the types of funding sources available, their ability to be used for transit, and the potential amount available given existing caps all vary from place-to-place and case-by-case. And ultimately, those factors are controlled by the state legislature.

This is why we need the state legislature to enable additional local funding options. Many local communities do not have the authority they need to fund adequate service now, let alone the growth and expansion that will be required in the years ahead. Secondly, then, the way by which local communities will decide if and how to fund transit (by public referenda, the vote of a governing council, etc.) must be decided.

Securing additional local funding options for transit is the cornerstone of the [Central Indiana Regional Transit Initiative](#), led by the [Central Indiana Transit Task Force](#) and building on the public sector's [Indy Connect](#) plan.

Get Involved and Take Action

As we said above, this toolkit is designed to provide the information and resources you need to educate your fellow Hoosiers and your elected officials on the benefits of improved transit service and the need for more dedicated funding.

The fact that you're reading this toolkit probably means transit is important to you. You understand the positive impact transit service makes in your community and around the state. Your advocacy action – in whatever ways are reasonable and meaningful to you – is critical as we work to achieve policy and funding changes that will lead to more and better transit service throughout Indiana.

Here are numerous ways you can get involved. Whether you choose to do one thing or many, our effort will benefit from your time, energy, voice and passion.

Join the Indiana Citizens' Alliance for Transit (ICAT)

- Recruit others to join.
- Participate in membership meetings and events.
- Make a donation to support our work.

Volunteer with ICAT

- Serve on our leadership team.
- Staff the ICAT booth at a conference or event (and let us know of events we should attend).
- Conduct research or provide professional services to advance ICAT's work.
- Provide transit advocacy training for others in your community.

Advocacy Tip

Always tell your own story – in your own words – about why transit matters to you.

Make it personal and share your reasons for being a passionate transit advocate.

Speak to your friends, neighbors, and colleagues about the benefits of transit, the funding issues, and how they can take action, too.

Give a presentation to a civic, social or business organization in your community.

- Presentation slides are available by request.

Become a media advocate

- Write and submit a Letter to the Editor, Op-Ed piece, or guest column for your local newspaper. *Sample letters are available in Appendix B.*
- Provide articles and information to be used in partner organizations' newsletters, promoting transit and encouraging advocacy action.
- Tell transit riders' stories in the local media and share them with us, too.
- Promote transit on social media.
 - Like the [ICAT Facebook page](#).
 - Follow us on [Twitter](#) and use the hashtag #INTransit.
 - Look at our connections to expand your own network.

In support of Central Indiana’s effort to secure dedicated local funding:

- [Sign the online petition](#) and ask others to do the same.
- Ask the businesses and organizations you’re affiliated with to [adopt a resolution of support](#).

Support your Local Transit Agency

- Meet with agency leadership to learn about their services, their funding challenges, and how you can best support them.
- Identify and organize other community partners that might want to support transit. This may include the Chamber of Commerce, major employers, local social/human service agencies, advocates for persons with disabilities, colleges and universities, churches, and more.
- Organize a “Ride the Bus” challenge to highlight and promote existing service.
- Organize a rally to draw attention to funding challenges and potential service cuts.
- Recruit local businesses and organizations to build, adopt and maintain bus stops.
- Testify on the transit agency’s behalf at budget hearings.

Contact your elected officials and tell them you want them to support funding for transit.

It is important that elected officials at all levels of government (local, state and federal) hear from you. [You can identify and get contact info for them here](#). This includes your Mayor or Town Manager, City or Town Council members, County Council members and County Commissioners, State Representative and State Senator, and others.

- Schedule an in-person meeting, which is the most effective way to convey your message to an elected official. Meet at his/her convenience within the district to discuss the importance of transit face-to-face.
- Attend town hall meetings, candidate forums and other community events where elected officials will be. Take advantage of these public events to tell your elected officials you want them to support funding for transit.
- Calling your elected official is another great way to show support for transit. You may not get an opportunity to speak directly with him/her, but may be able to speak with a staff person instead. This phone discussion is still very important, so make sure to treat them with the same level of respect and thank them for passing your concerns on to your elected official.
- Writing to an elected official provides another way to share the benefits of transit and to ask for support. An original letter will likely be read by the official, and will typically result in a written reply. *View a sample letter in Appendix C.*
- E-mail is a convenient way of contacting elected officials – particularly when policy decisions are being made quickly – but it may not always be the most impactful. Use a professional manner and tone in e-mail, just as you would a more formal letter. Sometimes advocacy alerts will provide standard text for you to include in correspondence. It is always a good idea to add your own thoughts and story to such an email.

Resources and Links

Indiana Transit Organizations

[Indiana Council on Specialized Transportation](#) (INCOST) is the statewide association for Indiana's small urban and rural public transit providers and specialized transit providers.

[Indiana Department of Transportation Office of Transit](#) provides financial and technical assistance to Indiana's transit systems and administers federal and state transit funding.

[Indiana High Speed Rail Association](#) (INHSRA) is comprised of grassroots citizens, professionals, and government representatives advocating for and dedicated to the development of a high-speed rail system connecting Indiana to cities across the Midwest.

[Indiana Transportation Association](#) (ITA) is a trade organization that represents public transportation, intercity, and private charter bus operators in Indiana, commuter railroad and other transportation-related agencies.

[Indiana Rural Transit Assistance Program](#) (RTAP) provides technical assistance and training to not-for-profit public and specialized transportation providers throughout the state.

Links to Indiana's transit agencies can be found [here](#) or in INDOT's Annual Report.

National Transit Organizations

[American Public Transportation Association](#) (APTA) is an international organization whose mission is to strengthen and improve public transportation. APTA serves and leads its diverse membership through advocacy, innovation and information sharing.

[Center for Transportation Excellence](#) (CFTE) is a non-partisan policy research center serving communities and transportation organizations nationwide. Their purpose is to provide research materials, strategies and other forms of support on the benefits of public transportation.

[Community Transportation Association of America](#) (CTAA) is a national association committed to removing barriers to isolation and improving mobility for all people. It offers educational programs and advocates making community transportation available, affordable and accessible.

[Easter Seals Project ACTION](#) (ESPA) promotes universal access to transportation for people with disabilities under federal law and beyond by partnering with transportation providers, the disability community and others through the provision of training, technical assistance, applied research, outreach and communication.

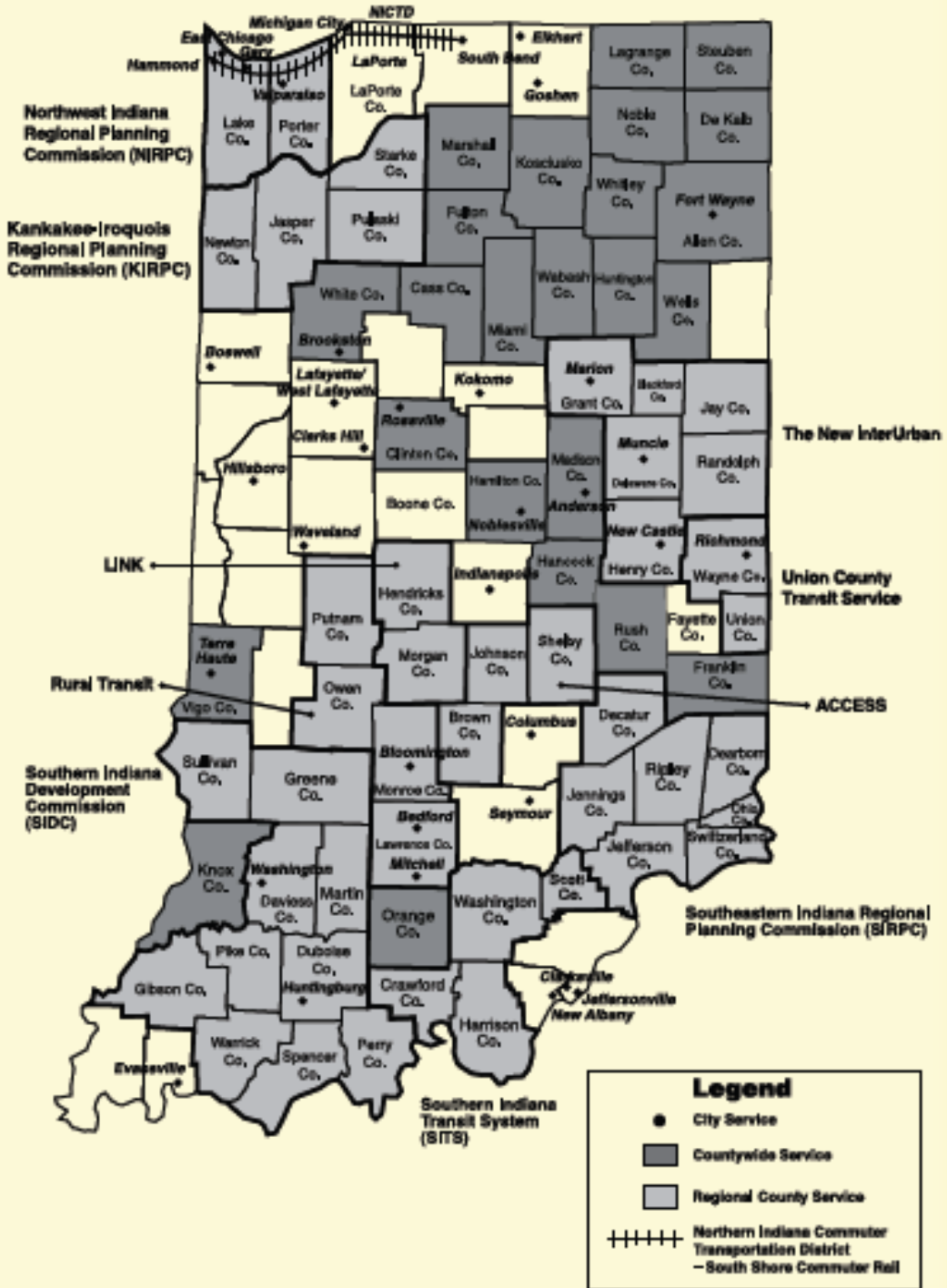
[National Association of Public Transit Advocates](#) (NAPTA) is a national organization representing grassroots transit coalitions that support increasing investment in public transportation.

[Transportation Equity Network](#) (TEN) is a grassroots network of more than 350 community organizations in 41 states working to create an equity-based national transportation system.

[Transportation for America](#) (T4A) is the largest, most diverse coalition working on transportation reform today and seeks to align national, state, and local transportation policies with issues like economic opportunity, climate change, energy security, health, housing and community development.

Appendix A
From INDOT's 2010 Indiana Public Transit Annual Report

2010 PUBLIC TRANSIT SYSTEMS IN INDIANA



Appendix B Sample Letters to the Editor

Sample Letter #1:

Dear Editor:

At a time in our state's history when countless Hoosiers are working harder than ever to find and keep a job, why are elected officials closing off options to mass transit?

I find it disturbing that funding levels for mass transit have reached their lowest points in years. Transit providers across the state are faced with maintaining quality service levels, which is nearly impossible to do under current transit funding plans. This chronic underfunding of transit has a negative ripple effect across our community, from the senior who rides the bus to a meal site, to the college student who relies on transit to get to work and school.

Indiana needs a dedicated revenue source so we can properly fund mass transit. At the same time, we need legislation that will allow communities like ours to decide if and how we will fund transit, and what transit options will work for us. I encourage my fellow Hoosiers to contact our local elected officials, state representative and state senator – they all need to hear that we expect them to support dedicated funding for transit!

Sincerely,

Name

Sample Letter #2

Dear Editor:

While other states are struggling, Indiana by all accounts has weathered the current economic climate to the best of our ability. Our local communities are making do during this economic downturn, and many are making tough decisions when it comes to funding priorities. Despite a growing demand, some have chosen to flat line expenditures on public transit. Others have let much-needed transportation services go by the wayside, since new funding is scarce.

Communities across Indiana are working overtime to bring new investment and jobs to our state. Potential companies pay close attention to available transit options, so their employees can get to and from work. Businesses with global operations are accustomed to using mass transit and their employees see it as an amenity, particularly when looking at relocation sites. If state leaders continue to put transit funding last, cutting services to the bone, we will surely be left behind in the competitive race for jobs.

Hoosiers, however, have a say in if and how mass transit is funded. That's why we need to contact our state representatives and senators and let them know that we want a dedicated funding source for transit. And, importantly, let communities like ours decide what transit options work for us – and how they should be funded.

Sincerely,

Name

Appendix C
Sample Letter to State Elected Officials

The Honorable XX
Indiana General Assembly
200 W Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Date

Dear Representative XX or Senator XX:

I am writing as one of your constituents to urge you to support dedicated funding for public transit and to support more local funding options for communities across the state.

Investment in public transportation benefits society in many ways. Building and operating transit systems creates jobs and connects people to them. Transit also:

- boosts economic development,
- saves families time and money,
- improves mobility and independence,
- enhances public health and safety, and
- decreases energy consumption while protecting the environment.

During the upcoming legislative session, please support measures to increase public transportation in Indiana and to give local entities more options for funding transit.

Sincerely,

Name