

**To:** Mr. Robert Zier, Chief of Staff  
Indiana Department of Transportation  
100 N. Senate Avenue  
IGCN- Room N758  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

**From:** Kristi DeLaurentiis, Metropolitan Planning Council  
Local Government and Community Relations

**Re:** Long-term recommendations for Cline Avenue

**Date:** 02.26.10

As an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, the Metropolitan Planning Council serves communities and residents by developing, promoting and implementing solutions for sound regional growth. Since 1934, MPC has been dedicated to shaping a more sustainable and prosperous Chicago region—which clearly includes northwest Indiana. MPC works in partnership with civic, business, community and government leaders, supporting economically competitive, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable initiatives. We've appreciated the opportunity to engage with members of the Cline Avenue Coalition and to provide input in the development of a position statement that identifies clear action steps for the greatest benefit to the region to them. We also welcome the opportunity to provide written comments for a long-term solution to you and INDOT LaPorte District officials.

The failure and closure of the Cline Avenue Bridge has resulted in an immediate crisis due to the disruption of traffic along the corridor, and subsequently impacted surrounding communities, businesses, and industries. Affected business and communities have predominantly focused on identifying solutions and roadway improvements that restore the function of the route, replace the bridge and serve the businesses of the area. However, we encourage INDOT to scrutinize longer term solutions for Cline Avenue, as the closure and demolition of the Cline Avenue Bridge provides an unheralded opportunity to consider solutions that better support economic development goals; catalyze investment; provide greater connectivity to Chicago, the lakefront and surrounding communities; and result in benefits with the greatest positive impact on northwest Indiana.

With that in mind, MPC submits the following recommendations with respect to long-term goals:

- 1) Use Cline Avenue, S.R. 912, as one piece in building a 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation network in Indiana. Develop and identify linkages that improve both mobility and

accessibility within northwest Indiana, to downtown Chicago jobs, the Lake Michigan shoreline and housing – facilitating the already occurring cross-border commutes.

- 2) Think of Cline Avenue as a catalyst in the economic recovery of northwest Indiana. Broad regional buy-in provides an opportunity to position the region to be competitive for other state and federal dollars, develop goal-driven and coordinated solutions, and to attract new development.
- 3) Enhance the environment and support the viability of neighborhoods at the community level. Proposed transportation improvements should be developed in coordination with already formulated community revitalization plans, in order to integrate transportation, housing, and water infrastructure; and make more effective the use of limited state and local resources.
- 4) Leverage the investment. INDOT's investment in the corridor should spark new economic development and community revitalization, change road conditions to improve economic prospects for business owners and residents, and improve commercial activity. Repurposing Cline Avenue should open up neighborhoods to redevelopment opportunity.
- 5) Incorporate well-defined bike routes. A new Cline Avenue corridor should also incorporate well-defined bike routes, where appropriate to community context, and support more pedestrian activity than is currently possible.
- 6) Connect the community to the lakefront. The elevated structure of Cline Avenue functions as a development barrier between communities and Lake Michigan. Proposed solutions should offer the means to connect the lakefront to redeveloping areas.
- 7) Connect to other modes. Use the opportunity to re-think Cline Avenue as a chance to develop multi-modal strategies that improve access to quality jobs, increases utilization of transit, provides greater surety for high-speed rail and/or airport success and future tourism industry growth.
- 8) Develop joint solutions. Investments in the Cline Avenue corridor could be made to resolve freight bottlenecks, minimize truck traffic, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve public health, aligning with federal guidelines and priorities. Identify solutions that support industry goals.
- 9) Reap community dividends. A top priority of the Obama Administration is to build economically competitive, healthy, opportunity-rich communities. Within their Sustainable Communities initiative, communities that work together and integrate transportation and housing decisions and increase the capacity to improve land use and zoning will be more competitive for federal funds. Goals for Cline Avenue should do more than reduce congestion and travel times or truck traffic on arterial streets. Targeted federal funding (DOT, HUD, EPA, and other programs) in the near future will go

towards infrastructure investments that protect the environment, provide more transportation options and lower transportation costs and improve access to affordable housing. INDOT should use Cline Avenue to set a vision for sustainable growth and to jumpstart integrated planning and investment decisions in Indiana, making northwest Indiana serve as a model, while ensuring the region is more competitive for future federal program dollars.

In summary, MPC encourages INDOT to use the *crisis* of Cline Avenue as an *opportunity* to develop a transportation network that serves northwest Indiana well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century—beyond solely replacing a bridge and re-establishing a truck route. We hope that INDOT sees the value of a “new Cline” that supports the redevelopment of the lakefront and surrounding communities, acts as a catalyst in the economic stability of the region, and results in the greatest positive impact for northwest Indiana.

Thank you for your consideration.

For more information, please contact:

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