



Transportation Times

Adams-Allen-DeKalb-Wells

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COVID-19 Effects on Construction

As we all paused our daily lives in March, spring began to arrive. As with every spring comes the start of road construction season. Has the coronavirus stalled road construction as it has stalled most all other activities this spring or has it been business as usual? The NIRCC staff reached out to local government agencies and engineering consultants to find out how COVID-19 regulations have affected road construction



as well as engineering and right of way acquisition on current projects. We sent a

number of questions to the Allen County Highway Department, the City of Fort Wayne, the City of New Haven, the Town of Huntertown, and the Town of Leo-Cedarville. We sent the same questions to consultants that currently have a project in the NIRCC 2020-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The following are some of the questions that were asked and a summary of the answers from the LPAs and the consultants.

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Highway Director***Jay Mitchell***INDOT (Non-voting members)***B****Joyce Newland***Federal Highway
Administration
(Non-voting member)***Saving Old Iron Railroad Bridges by Building Trails**

by Randy Lehman, President, South Adams Trails

In 2006, South Adams Trails (a 501(c)3 all-volunteer not-for-profit) decided to build a hiking/biking trail to connect Geneva and Berne, two rural communities located in southern Adams County. When finished it would be a 3.5-mile paved trail. It also provides the opportunity to build a trail going north, connecting to the Adams County seat in Decatur, and west connecting to Ouabache State Park in Bluffton.

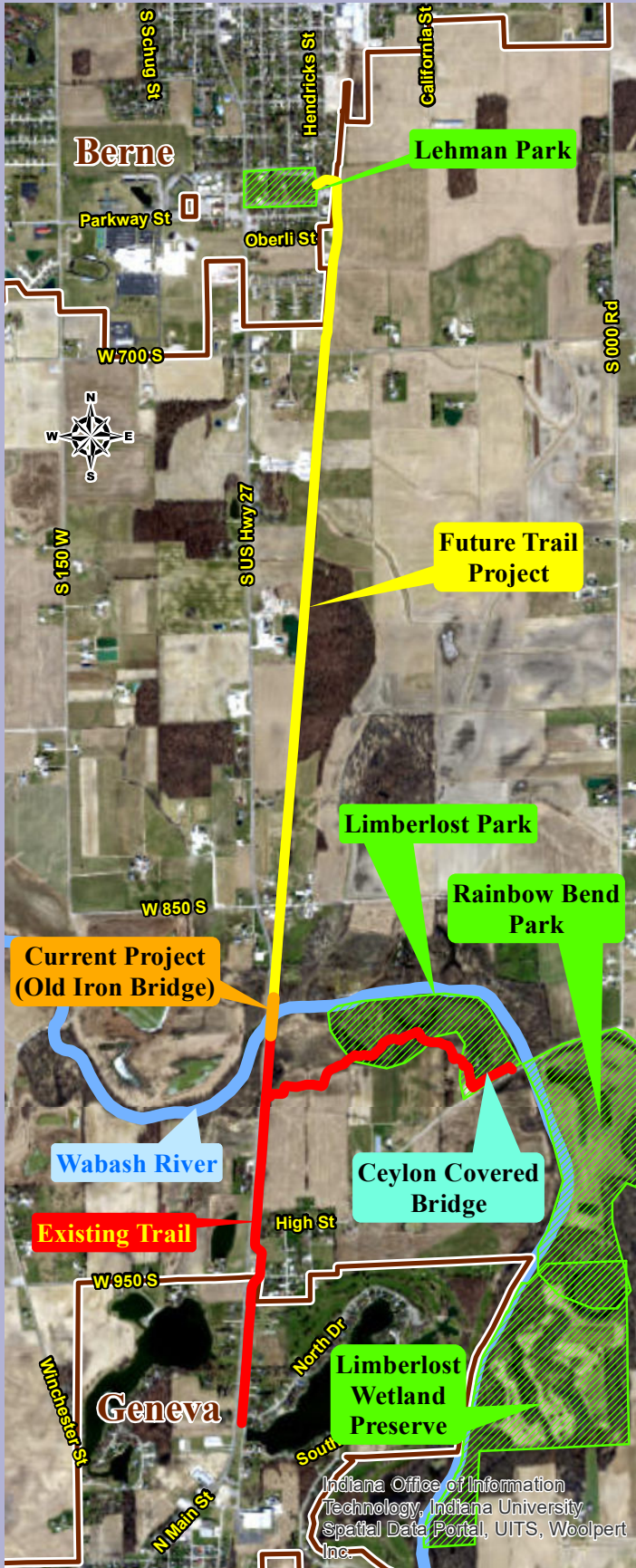


Today, the trail project to connect Geneva and Berne is still a work in progress, but we have a lot to brag about, including a trailhead with parking and restrooms, and a mile of trail is complete—there's a half-mile spur trail to the Ceylon Covered Bridge and a half-mile of trail from the parking lot to the Wabash River. See the map on the next page for details of our project. Many doubted that South Adams Trails (SAT) volunteers would have the resolve, let alone the money, to keep moving this expensive and complicated project forward, but we've always managed to keep making progress.

What's made the project cost so much and take so long? First, the trail has to cross the Wabash River—pedestrian river crossings can be expensive. Second, to pay for this expensive undertaking, SAT has had to rely on a Federal grant—primarily a Transportation Enhancement Grant which has paid 80% of the project costs, leaving SAT to pay 20% of the project. Although a very important financial resource for trail development, for anyone not familiar with TE Grants, there can be delays, unexpected expenses and complications.

To pay its share of the expected and unexpected costs of this project, SAT received numerous other grants—the largest being \$498,000 from the NE Indiana Regional Development Authority. To help meet financial obligations SAT has also received generous donations from local businesses and individuals and has had to borrow some funds from local banks.

From the beginning, SAT wanted to use one of the old 1890s railroad bridges, which was still in place, to help create the pedestrian walkway across the Wabash River. The picture above shows the old bridge being lifted from its abutments (a process that took place in February and March of this year). The bridge is being disassembled, and then will be sandblasted, inspected, and painted. This on-site bridge only gets us part of the way across the Wabash River and floodplain. Over a century ago,



two railroad bridges spanned the Wabash at this location just north of Geneva, but one was removed, and the iron scrapped back in the 1960s.

To find a replacement for the missing bridge, we decided to use another 1890s railroad bridge that crossed the St. Mary's River in Decatur. This bridge was removed and disassembled back in 2009 to make way for another more modern bridge. The picture below shows the Decatur bridge being lifted from its abutments and set aside for disassembly.



SAT's Railroad Bridge project is being coordinated by PRIMECO Construction Company, located in Ft. Wayne, and engineered by Butler Fairman & Seufert, Indianapolis.

We are currently applying for grants and raising money to construct the trail from CR 850S to Lehman Park in Berne. When this section of trail is finished, this will complete a project that started 13 years ago. If you want more information or wish to make a donation, please contact me by email: randyplehman@comcast.net

Work Zone Awareness



Indiana, and states across the U.S. observed April 20-24, 2020 as Work Zone Awareness Week. National Work Zone Awareness Week marked the ceremonial start to highway construction season and sought to bring awareness to motorists and worker safety in highway work zones.

The theme for the 2020 National Work Zone Awareness Week (NWZAW) was "Safe Work Zones for All:

Protect workers. Protect road users.”

"Work Zone Awareness Week is as much for everyday drivers as it is for those working on the roads," Governor Eric J. Holcomb said. "We want everyone to stay safe when they are out on our roadways and that is the responsibility of all Hoosiers."

The dangers are real. In 2019, nearly 30 people were killed in INDOT work zone crashes, which was the highest loss of life in the last fifteen years.

Over 1,100 INDOT construction projects are planned across the state of Indiana this year, with many projects already underway or beginning soon. So far, in 2020, 37 people have been injured in INDOT work zone crashes.

"Safety is always in the forefront of our minds at INDOT. We have extensive safety plans in place to prevent work zone crashes, but we need everyone to help make that a reality," INDOT Commissioner Joe McGuinness said.

INDOT utilizes work zone signage, traffic alerts and social media to keep Hoosiers up to date on construction projects. Drivers can visit www.nextlevelroads.com to use an interactive online map to see projects that are happening around the state. Current work zones and real-time traffic conditions are also available on the INDOT Cars Program map. To learn more about NWZAW, visit nwzaw.org.

LPA ERC TRAINING

The 2020 Basic Recertification ERC training is online. In order to register, please send the following information to LPAQuestions@indot.in.gov

- Name
- Contact Number
- Agency
- Email address (must provide individual email addresses)
- Course you wish to be enrolled in

You will receive a confirmation email once you have been enrolled, including detailed instructions on how to get started.

NIRCC Has A New Van

Take a look at NIRCC's new traffic counting van! This new vehicle will improve the efficient collection of roadway data that helps identify problem areas and supports roadway improvements.

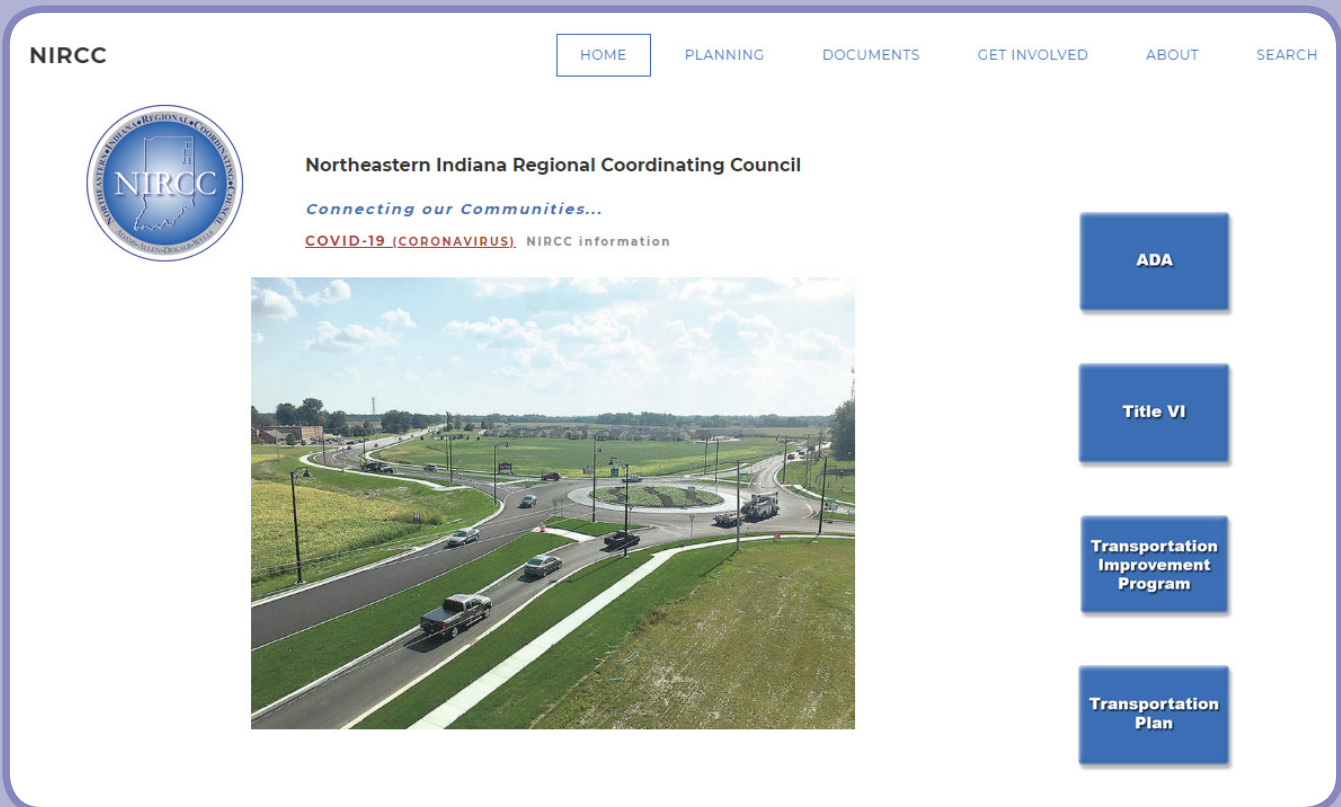


When you see this vehicle on our roadways, **PLEASE BE CAUTIOUS** and **SLOW DOWN**. Just like you, our Data Technicians have families that want them home safely every night.



Thank you and stay safe!

NIRCC's New Website!



We are proud to introduce our newly designed website at <https://www.nircc.com>. You are invited to visit us and visit often! The website has a completely new and updated look, and is much easier to navigate.

We have taken the time to layout a site that will hopefully benefit everyone from the interested citizen to the seasoned professional. The process in designing a new website can be daunting, however the NIRCC staff really stepped up, collaborated, and through a team effort, built a new site totally using in-house expertise. It was a great learning experience for staff to thoughtfully analyze what information and reports are most important to share, and how it should fit together

in a well-designed and organized manner.

As you visit the site you will note our new navigation menu across the top. Here you can access numerous documents, maps and other planning information. We tried to simplify the menu and organize it in a way that is concise and easy to use.

We hope you find the new website informative and useful. We would appreciate your feedback along with any suggestions to improve our site and its content. Our intent is to share information most useful to you and necessary to communicate important planning activities.



Check us out on
Instagram too!!



2020 Community Crossings Grant Recipients



On April 7th Governor Holcomb and INDOT Commissioner McGuinness announced the Indiana cities, towns and counties that received in state-matching funds for local road projects through the Next Level Roads:

Community Crossings Initiative. Congratulations to the following grant recipients:

- Allen County
- City of Decatur
- City of Fort Wayne
- City of Garrett
- Town of Leo-Cedarville
- Wells County

Launched in 2016, the Community Crossings Matching Grant Program provides funding to cities, towns, and counties across Indiana to make improvements to local roads and bridges. Community Crossings is a partnership between INDOT and Hoosier communities, both urban and rural, to invest in infrastructure projects that catalyze economic development, create jobs, and strengthen local transportation networks. State lawmakers identified long-term funding for Community Crossings as part of House Enrolled Act 1002, passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Holcomb in April 2017.

Projects that are eligible for funding through Community Crossings include road resurfacing and preservation, bridge rehabilitation or replacement, road reconstruction with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance in connection with a road project. Material costs for chip sealing and crack filing operations are also eligible for funding.

Projects submitted to INDOT for funding will be evaluated based on need, traffic volume, local support, impact on connectivity and mobility within the community and regional economic significance. Community Crossings is open to all local government units in the State of Indiana.

- Cities and towns with a population of fewer than

- 10,000 will receive funds using a 75/25% match
- Cities and towns with a population of greater than 10,000 will receive funds using a 50/50% match
- Counties with a population of fewer than 50,000 people will receive funds using a 75/25% match
- Counties with a population of greater than 50,000 people will receive funds using a 50/50% match

Here are the funding awards for communities in Northeast Indiana:

Allen County was awarded \$1,000,000 to resurface the following county roads:

- Yoder Road from SR 1 to Hoagland Road
- Hoagland Road from Yoder Road to Franke Road
- Minnich Road from Hoagland Road to Paulding Road
- Lincoln Highway East from US 30 to SR 101
- Paulding Road from Lincoln Highway East to SR 101
- Gromeaux Road from Lincoln Highway East to Sampson Road

The City of Fort Wayne received \$1,000,000 for the following road project:

- Springwood Neighborhood Concrete Rehabilitation located east of Coldwater Road to south of Cook Road, improvements include replacement of deteriorated concrete streets, upgrade of sidewalk ramps to meet ADA and replacement of deteriorated concrete sidewalk sections

At this time no information is available on the projects for the following communities (as of 5/1/2020):

- The City of Decatur received \$812,094.02
- The City of Garrett was awarded \$431,437.50
- The Town of Leo-Cedarville received \$511,419.46
- Wells County received \$849,917.06

Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT) and the Traffic Count Program

NIRCC has completed the Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT) report for 2019. In 2019 there was 7,980,264 vehicle miles traveled. This is 1.31% higher



than in 2018 (7,877,195 Vehicle Miles of Travel).

To calculate VMT statistics NIRCC utilizes traffic count data collected throughout the year. In 2019, 684 locations were counted throughout Allen County. NIRCC also collects count data for other counties. NIRCC counted 306 locations in Adams County and 374 locations in Wells County. NIRCC plans on working in Allen County and DeKalb County for the 2020 traffic counting program.

COVID-19 Effects on Construction continued...

In general how have things changed for you and your organization since the social distancing and other requirements have been in place?

Most employees stated they are working remotely from home, however, the City of Fort Wayne Traffic Engineering Department has continued to work in their downtown offices. For field employees, it is mostly business as usual, other than maintaining social distancing. Meetings are happening virtually or by teleconferencing. Communication was stated as being very critical in order to insure that projects continue to move forward without delay. Multiple platforms such as Skype, Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams are being used to communicate effectively. Construction projects are benefiting from the substantially reduced work-zone traffic volumes from COVID-19 stay-at-home orders.

How have your projects been affected?

Regularly scheduled progress meetings have transitioned to online instead of in person. This makes it harder to resolve issues that arise. Availability of team members and clients due to restrictions and impacts at times create delays. Some projects have started early, this may or may not have to do with the coronavirus. Most construction seems to be moving forward but may be impacted as contractor workforce tries to comply with social distancing recommendations. Some that are working from home have seen a lag in the internet due to connecting with office computers and the band-width it is using. Things are moving along, just a little bit slower.

Do you anticipate projects needing additional time to be completed?

Most think delays are inevitable, between keeping projects adequately staffed, social distancing, materials delivered on time, obtaining necessary permits and potentially additional restrictions. In addition to these concerns are the funding concerns as gasoline tax revenues go down. The main concern seems to be that some projects may need time extensions due to slower pace because of social distancing and the ability to obtain materials from delivery delays and production shut-downs.

The majority of the responses we received were overwhelmingly similar for all questions. Many are working remotely from home and all are social distancing and using email, teleconferencing and virtual meetings to commu-



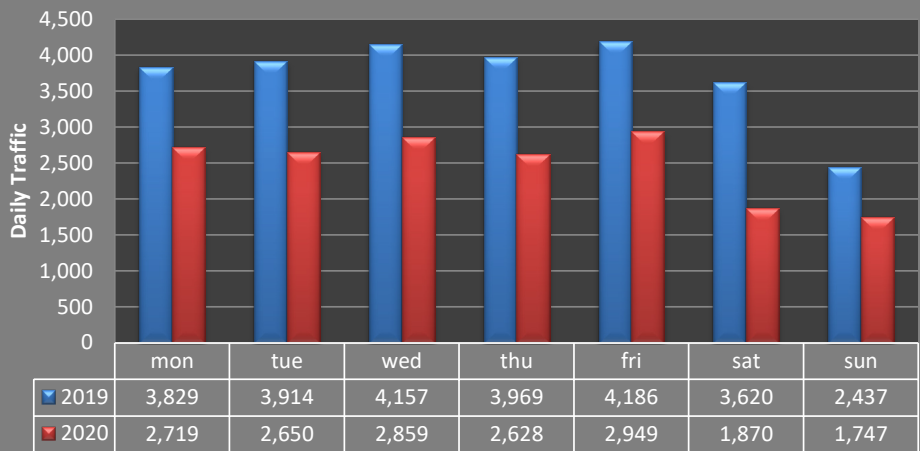
nicate and keep projects moving forward. Most that responded have not seen a lot of delays with projects yet, but anticipate delays will come. The uncertainties on budgets and capital funding due to decreased tax revenues also are a concern of all. This may not affect this year's projects, but it could affect projects scheduled for next year.

Pandemic Effects on Traffic

During the COVID-19 health crisis there have been some interesting shifts in traffic patterns throughout our region. NIRCC has been monitoring the traffic counts throughout Allen County with our seven permanent traffic count locations. We took a sample of this data from the beginning of April 2020 and compared it to what the level looked like in 2019.

The chart to the right shows what a rural section of Coldwater Road looked like in 2019 compared to the same time period in 2020 during the pandemic. As you can see the traffic between Monday and Friday was 30% higher in 2019 than it was in 2020. On Saturday there was a significant drop of 48% in the traffic for 2020. Sunday saw a much smaller decrease in 2020 with only a 28% drop.

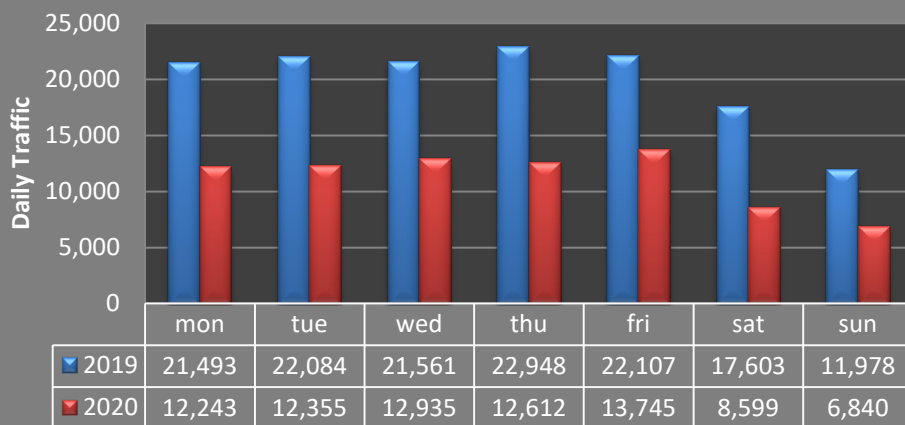
**Coldwater Rd Traffic Count Comparison
1st Week of April**



The chart below shows what a busy city street in downtown Fort Wayne

looks like between 2019 and the same time period in 2020 during the pandemic. During the weekdays of Monday to Friday we see a 42% decrease in the amount of traffic in 2020. On Saturday we can see that there is a 51% decrease in the amount of traffic and a 42% decrease on Sunday.

**Washington Blvd Traffic Count Comparison
1st Week of April**



According to a KPC News article where they interviewed INDOT Spokesman Scott Manning, Indiana’s traffic has seen an overall decline of 40% or more since the governor’s stay at home order took effect on March 25th. The reduction of traffic shows that Hoosiers are listening to the order and working from home if possible.

With this reduction in traffic caused by the pandemic there are some positive and negative effects. For instance, INDOT crew and other

construction workers out there working on our public roadways have benefitted from the reduced traffic which has created safer work zone conditions. Manning did say though that less traffic has created some issues with increased driver speeds in some cases.

“In terms of worker safety, reduced traffic can potentially create safer conditions, and in some cases allow crews to complete work more quickly”, Manning Said. “However, something we’re watching very closely is travel speeds. Unfortunately, with traffic greatly reduced, we are seeing some troubling increase in average vehicle

speeds which is detrimental to worker safety. We are regularly reminding motorists and working with law enforcement to remind drivers that less traffic is not an invitation to ignore posted speed limits.”

One negative to the stay at home order is the impact that reduced travel will have on gas tax revenue. Road work is primarily funded by the gas tax, and with fewer vehicles on the road, less gas has been sold. We do not know yet what impact this will have for sure but there are assumptions across the county that funding may be affected.

“We don’t fully know the budgetary impact for IN-DOT yet because it will largely depend on how long restrictions stay in place and travel remains reduced. Once the revenue picture comes into focus, we will do an in-depth analysis of our long-term program to see what adjustments need to be made. Our finance team is not anticipating any significant short-term impacts,” Manning said.

Another article which was found on TaxFoundations.org had the following to say about the gas tax.

According to INRIX, a traffic data analytics company, compared to the week of February 22, just before the pandemic was officially called,

personal travel nationwide for the week of March 23 had decreased by 44 percent. Even compared to the week before the March 23 week, there had been a 20 percent decrease. Trucking is also down, but not to the same degree, as businesses (especially retail stores and pharmacies) still need inventory. Long haul trucking is down 3 percent whereas local trucking operations are down 14 percent. The overall decline in road traffic is 38 percent. Such a decline will lead to a dramatic decline in gas tax revenue.

How much this will affect tax receipts is hard to estimate precisely because no one knows how long social distancing will be the norm. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials has estimated a 30 percent drop in gas tax revenue based on data from the last recession (2008-2009). However, the current crisis’s mitigation policies make a one-to-one comparison challenging.

So we shall see where the future takes us in regards to traffic volumes and the gas tax. Since the stay at home order is no longer in affect we expect that traffic volumes will begin rising and more gasoline will be purchased. Only time will tell how much of an impact this health crisis has had on our transportation economy.

Transportation Open House

NIRCC’s Transportation Planning Open House will occur a little differently this year. Usually NIRCC has an open house in the spring or early summer that is open to the public to give people a chance to see all the different aspects of our transportation planning process and provide input as well. It gives people the chance to review, comment, or ask questions about the current or proposed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), our long range transportation plan (2040 Transportation Plan), and all the elements that make up these plans and the planning process. With the COVID-19 situation this year NIRCC will be working on creating a different way for the public to get involved that will ensure the safety of everyone. Once these plans are made, information will be posted on our website and notifications will be sent out. In the meantime feel free to see all NIRCC’s plans and the most current TIP (2020-2024 TIP) on our website at www.nircc.com.

NIRCC

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