



Economic Resilience Plan for:

Kankakee-Iroquois Regional Planning Commission

May 2022



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Economic Resilience Plan for: Kankakee-Iroquois Regional Planning Commission

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY PLAN

Definition: An approach for how the region can prepare for and foster networks that can advance long-term efforts to improve key industries and infrastructure to respond to disruption more effectively.

Primary Actions toward Economic Resiliency:

- Convene community and business leaders across the K-IRPC region to develop a set of actions and priorities to promote and sustain economic growth
- Identify regional weaknesses that limit businesses and individuals' abilities to avoid, withstand, and recover from economic shocks
- Fully mitigate risks to the extent possible and build a regionally coordinated capacity to respond
- Plan for regional disruptions with rapid response strategies and measures
- Contribute to region-wide strategies to build economic resilience and promote development by:
 - Advancing existing industry
 - Improving infrastructure and quality-of-life amenities
 - Strengthening the regional workforce

PROCESS



Due Diligence / Desktop Research: The Project Team conducted due diligence and desktop research of available information regarding the K-IRPC Region including demographics, income distribution, education attainment, population trends, etc., to gain insights to inform plan recommendations.



Stakeholder Survey: A K-IRPC Community Needs Survey was conducted and distributed through seven Local Economic Development Organizations (LEDOs) who in turn distributed the survey to organizations within their contact lists. These organizations included businesses, business intermediaries, community foundations, education and training providers, healthcare, local governments, and local service providers.



Focus Group Meetings: Between 27th September and 1st October 2021, focus group meetings were conducted. These meetings provided the Project Team with additional stakeholder input focused on the Covid-19 pandemic shock to the region and how various businesses, organizations and governments pivoted to survive, and in some cases, even thrived during the disruption.



K-IRPC Region Analysis: The Project Team has since digested and evaluated the information collected, along with stakeholder input and feedback provided, to assemble recommendations within this resiliency plan. Following presentation of the Draft Plan Recommendations to the K-IRPC board, the Project Team has completed remaining edits to complete the Resiliency Plan Recommendations.



Draft Recommendations: The result of the first four process efforts will be draft recommendations for K-IRPC board review and comment. This input will inform the final recommendations within the Economic Resiliency Plan.



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PROJECT LAUNCH

At the May 27th, 2021, K-IRPC Board meeting, Kimley-Horn shared the process being undertaken to develop a Resilience Plan to help the eight-county region continue progress toward key goals and become even more resilient to future disruptions within the regional economy. A flyer outlining the process was reviewed and made available to assist with region stakeholder engagements to support the effort. The following information was presented:

Effective means toward region-wide strategies to build economic resilience and promote development:

- K-IRPC and Chamber of Commerce initiatives to support and advance existing industry
- Targeted county and city investments in quality-of-life amenities and infrastructure
- Ongoing education and regional workforce training

Team members also collected input from Board Members. Of the sixteen (16) attendees, a majority felt the 2020 CEDS was either not relevant to the COVID pandemic (5) or were neutral (7) about the relevancy of the CEDS to challenges created by COVID. Four (4) attendees felt the CEDS prepared the region for COVID-induced economic shocks.

Attendees identified opportunities they hoped to achieve with a Regional Economic Resiliency Plan: increased regional collaboration through K-IRPC leadership; developing, attracting, and retaining workforce talent; program development for small business growth; and building/improving housing stock for the region.

Research and Due Diligence

The Project Team conducted a review of these existing plans & documents to inform the process for the K-IRPC Resiliency Plan update:

- 2020 CEDS
- County Transportation Plan
- County and City Comprehensive Plans
- K-IRPC Regional Survey responses
- K-IRPC Region Demographics and available data

Stakeholder Survey

A stakeholder survey was launched largely utilizing K-IRPC County LEDO contacts. The stakeholder survey launched on August 9th and closed on August 16th 2021 with eighty-seven respondents from all eight counties representing four major groups: private for-profit business (35), not-for-profit organizations

(29), government and public sector agencies (11) and educational institutions (10).

Notable survey responses:

- Surveyed organizations made adaptations to continue operations during the pandemic. Fifty-nine (59) entities made operational changes and/or modifications to their physical workspace. Fifty-one (51) organizations made changes to how their organization delivered services and/or products. Forty-three (43) modified communications with clients/target populations. Private for-profit businesses were more likely to make operational changes to their workforce relative to other adaptations. Five (5) of the respondents indicated that their organization made no adaptations during the pandemic.
 - See Figure 1 on the following page for full results.
- Nine (9) organizations provided additional information on their adaptations prompted by the Pandemic. Many organizations have made permanent operational changes, mostly through the delivery of services virtually, but also by allowing teleworking, utilizing plexiglass shields, and mandating indoor mask policies to mitigate virus transmission.
- Organizations have continued Pandemic-related salary increases for essential employees. Many have initiated more flexible work hours.
- Manufacturers and food processors have indicated ongoing challenges associated with sourcing components, equipment, and supplies in a timely manner to avoid production delays.
- Financing for business operations and not-for profit organizations was not considered a challenge for most respondents. Eight (8) organizations provided additional information on finance related challenges that they faced in the past year and a half. Several not-for-profit entities indicated that despite Pandemic related fundraiser cancelations, coupled with a decrease in donations, support from community



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Figure 1: Community organizations adaptations during pandemic.

During the Pandemic, How Did Your Organization Adapt?



foundations sustained their organizations. Although some organizations were unable to obtain financing to build infrastructure and expand services that likely would have increased their ability to sustain operations, it was noted that these organizations generally did not pursue available resources due to management pride or lack of awareness.

- Some education institutions and private-for-profit businesses have had difficulty managing reduced budgets to replace employees that resigned during the Pandemic.

Focus Groups

MEETINGS

The first three focus group meetings were conducted in person across all stakeholder types at various locations throughout the K-IRPC Region. The last three were virtual meetings focused on these stakeholder types: Non-Profit organizations, For-Profit organizations, and government representatives.

K-IRPC region County Economic Development Corporation directors, utilizing their existing contacts, extended Focus Group Meeting invitations to stakeholders within their counties. Face to Face, socially distanced meetings were held on these 2021 dates and at these locations:

- September 27, 11 am, The Annex, 410 S. Adaway, Fowler, IN, Benton County
- September 27, 3 pm, Delphi Community Center, 311 N. Washington Street, Delphi IN, Carroll County
- September 28, 12:30 pm, Community Development, 623 W. 11th Street, Winimac, IN, Pulaski County

Virtual Meetings were held on these 2021 dates for any participants within the K-IRPC Region:

- September 29th, 9 am virtual meeting soliciting responses from Non-Profit organizations
- September 30, 9 am, virtual meeting soliciting responses from private businesses
- October 1, 10 am, virtual meeting soliciting responses from government representatives

RESULTS

The Project Team's due diligence, demographics research, online survey, and stakeholder meetings have been aggregated into three key categories:



1. Challenges



2. Assets



3. Strategies

- Long term
- Short term



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1. KEY CHALLENGES

K-IRPC Region primary challenges revolve around these three needs: a lack of adequate housing stock, a lack of broadband infrastructure to provide affordable internet access and a lack of transportation connectivity to provide access to employment, healthcare, and services.

Housing

This challenge evolves around housing affordability for workforce needs and is directly tied to the comparatively lower wages being offered to many K-IRPC Region employees. In rural Indiana, this situation tends to increase rental housing units and decrease owner occupied housing units, as fewer residents have the capacity to manage a mortgage. This situation also brings a corresponding degradation in housing quality due to lack of proper maintenance and care. This circumstance also limits the Region's ability to attract talent and retain existing talent due to lack of quality housing.

A lack of available housing product mix for families in various stages of maturity and financial capacity continues to limit the Region's ability to grow. Quality housing from subsidized, to duplex, to single family to multifamily are generally difficult to obtain throughout the Region. Housing developers are not attracted to the K-IRPC Region where population decline (six of eight counties) or no growth (two of eight counties) has continued for decades. Nearly all new K-IRPC Region housing starts are being initiated by the wealthiest residents who can afford contractor built custom homes. Lastly, with housing availability in such short supply, finding a home with convenient proximity to employment centers, health care and desired services oftentimes proves difficult to secure.

Broadband

The need for broadband connectivity became critically obvious during the shutdowns taking place across the country during the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. As work from home and remote learning became the predominant alternatives to work and education, residents in unserved areas and underserved areas found themselves at an immediate disadvantage. Most rural Indiana workers and students were challenged by

one of these three hinderances: no internet availability in their area, limited or spotty internet service in the area, and/or slow download and upload speeds that impact their ability to do their jobs or their homework. Finally, if one had access to a reliable network with productive speeds, for many in the K-IRPC region, the cost to maintain such services was prohibitive.

BUSINESS INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

The challenges associated with no internet access and limited/unreliable internet access are significant. Most business procurement measures, client and customer communications, invoicing and payments for goods and services, are either mostly or entirely transacted electronically via email and web-based portals. Lack of reliable internet access can be an obstacle to maintaining a competitive presence in the marketplace in today's business environment.

PRIVATE RESIDENT INTERNET ACCESS

Poor internet access and low affordability limits families' ability to access digital services for dependent care, education, work, business, and healthcare. For those with some internet access, reliable high-speed internet access can also be a challenge, especially in unincorporated parts of the county where there is only one incumbent provider and speed of service is limited. The lack of highspeed and affordable internet access negatively affects an employee's ability to connect with local employers and work remotely.

For the K-IRPC resident, the challenges of no internet access impacts personal life in these ways: an inability to stay connected with family and friends through social media, email, and photo sharing; inability to purchase food and merchandise for delivery to the home; no access to online media outlets, education, and training programs, nor remote learning. For the K-IRPC resident, when reliable service with high speeds is available, the cost to maintain services are often cost prohibitive. A



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trend that could address this issue in the K-IRPC region is the growing provision of high-speed internet within the rent of workforce housing projects.

Transportation Connectivity

RIDE SHARING, ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION & CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

Workers need to be able to *get to work*. Access to transportation is necessary to do virtually anything in rural areas. Residents in rural areas with no access, or limited access, to transportation services oftentimes have difficulty consistently getting to work. Where existing bus service exists in the region, resources limit the transportation service to single stop grocery or medical appointments, with no daily service to employment centers. Reliable and affordable transportation is generally important to support business' ability to attract and retain talent. Ride sharing programs and infrastructure investments in community connectivity for alternative transportation between workforce housing and employment centers could be a viable solution to this challenge within K-IRPC region cities and towns.

RIDE SHARING

A viable alternative to public transportation in rural areas are ride sharing programs. Intermediaries, like the local Chamber of Commerce, larger employers, managers of commerce parks and faith-based organizations, are all capable of instituting and maintaining ridesharing coordination services to connect: those with a need, and those with the means, to transport workers to places of employment. These services provide a reliable workforce, expand social networks, and build resiliency into the region.

ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION

Besides needing reliable transportation to work, K-IRPC residents also need transportation facilities to provide access to single-stop destinations such as the grocery store, pharmacy, personal shopping, and doctor's visits. Reliable and affordable transportation infrastructure is important to make the region appealing to residents and to support business and industry's ability to attract and retain talent. Alternative transportation facilities that allow residents to walk and bike to work, but also to single stop destinations, have many benefits, including: the promotion of active living lifestyles with the attending workforce health improvements, less reliance on fossil fuel vehicles, improved air quality, expanded social networks and greater regional resiliency.

CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

Transportation asset management plans can be an effective tool to build reliable transportation facilities to support various means of mobility within the region, whether in a vehicle, on a bike or on foot. Policies that support a complete streets approach to community development are a first step in achieving equitable and reliable transportation networks that serve everyone in the region. Critical connections within the transportation network should be prioritized within the asset management plan to build connectivity to community and regional destinations to improve and expand regional resiliency. Destinations to which connectivity will expand resiliency include: employment centers, pharmacies, medical centers, groceries, libraries, day care facilities, personal services, athletic facilities, parks, town and city halls, county courthouses, shopping centers, places of worship, and entertainment venues.



2. KEY ASSETS:

The K-IRPC Region hosts several Key Assets upon which to build a strong foundation of established networks, amenities, and attractions to improve area resiliency. K-IRPC Region networks include community organizations, intermediaries, government agencies and financial institutions. The K-IRPC Region amenities and attractions include destination experiences, small town Main Street events and festivals, as well as parks, preserves, rivers and natural resources.



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Existing Community Based Networks

The operational structure and permanence of existing community-based networks provide a framework within which greater resiliency can be achieved. The Kankakee-Iroquois Regional Planning Commission, based in the geographical center of the eight-county region, serves the entire region. K-IRPC provides grant assistance to cities, towns to support community planning, community development, and infrastructure needs. Additional networks within the K-IRPC Region that can be utilized to build resiliency include community foundations, schools, faith-based organizations, and intermediaries such as Chambers of Commerce, the Wabash Heartland Innovation Network, and the Indiana Manufacturing Network.

Existing Government Based Networks

Dependable tax revenue streams support operations, maintenance and construction of public infrastructure, community buildings, parks, and civic amenities. The permanent organizational structures within town, city, county, state, and federal governments provide additional networks around which to build regional resiliency. Governmental agencies, from local cities and towns to counties, from the State of Indiana to the federal government, manage a variety of assistance programs and grants to promote regional economic stability and resilience. Governments are led by elected officials whose charge is to serve the public. Working with elected officials to address community and regional needs provides yet another network to bring solutions to the challenges facing the K-IRPC Region.



Restored Monticello City Hall



Jasper County Courthouse

Existing Financing Networks

A key network in every community is the private sector finance industry. The longest standing entities in this network are *for profit* local, national, and international private banks that provide financing for everything from personal purchases of homes and automobiles to financing for construction and expansions of schools, corporations, and developments. Credit Unions first arrived in the US in 1909 as *not for profit* entities. They have spread across the entire country since, serving the finance industry with a focus on the individual. Finally, *for profit* crowd funding arrived in the US in 1997 via online financing of specific needs. All three of these private financing measures charge a fee for their services with users gaining the benefit of capital to accomplish their goals. K-IRPC Region financing networks provide a valuable service in providing the capital to keep local economies healthy and vibrant.



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Amenities and Attractions

Talent attraction and talent retention are necessary for business, industry, and institutions in the K-IRPC Region to successfully tap into that talent to thrive and prosper. Regional amenities and attractions contribute to talent attraction and retention by providing those special places offering social engagement, things to do, events for shared experiences and social connectivity to facilitate one's enjoyment of life. The Knight Foundation refers to this as "*Place Attachment*", where people continue to choose to live in an area where they are enjoying their day to day lives. Promoting and embellishing K-IRPC Region amenities and attractions are worthy endeavors to build resiliency and stem population decline.



Winimac Town Park



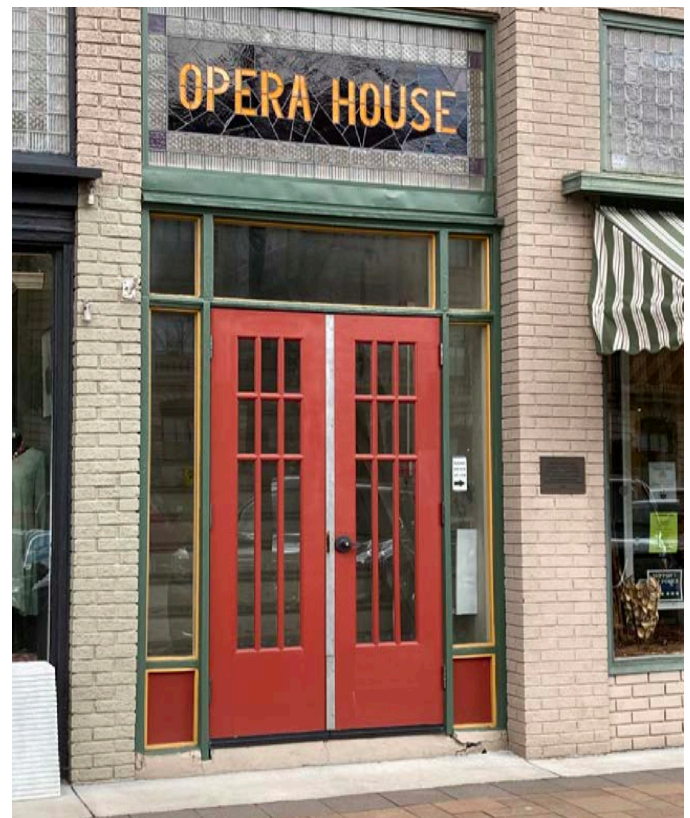
Delphi Canal Museum — a float on historic canal

REGIONAL DESTINATIONS

The K-IRPC Region has much to offer in regional destinations for those seeking the small-town life or a natural/rural residential environment. Co-branding of the K-IRPC Region would be prudent to highlight all the destinations and experiences one can find in the area.

LOCAL EXPERIENCES

Local experiences provide residents and visitors with place encounters- imbued with history and nature plus events that enrich their lives and build one's "*Place Attachment*" to the area. K-IRPC Region examples include Indiana Beach, Fair Oaks Farms, and the entertainment offerings of historic theaters and performance halls, like the Delphi Opera House and the Fowler Theater.



Delphi Opera House Original Entrance



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Fair Oaks Farms



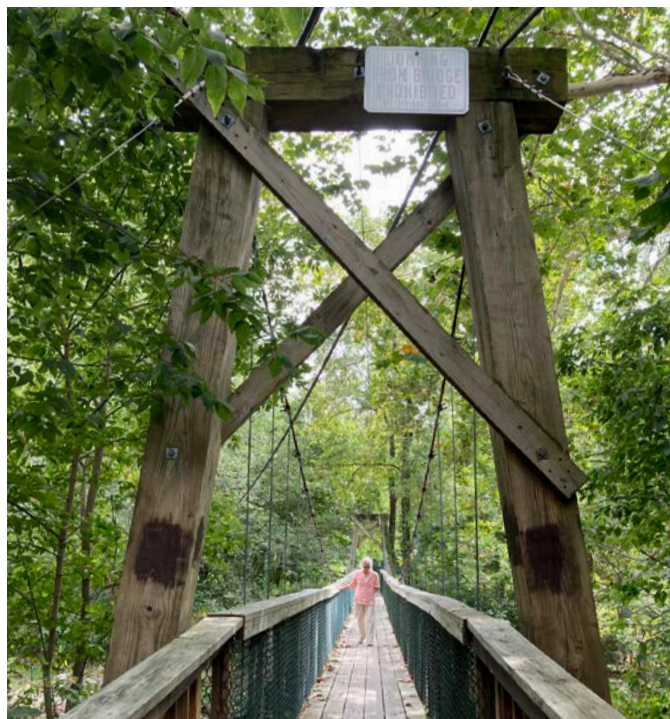
Bison at Kankakee Sands

PROXIMITY TO POPULATION CENTERS

For those seeking to live within a small town or rural residence surrounded by nature and farmland with a desire to access the amenities, attractions, and events that big cities offer, the K-IRPC Region has the best of both worlds. Nearly all K-IRPC residents live within an hour of Lafayette, West Lafayette, and Purdue University offerings. Weekend excursions to Chicago, Indianapolis, South Bend and Fort Wayne are also easily accessed by K-IRPC residents, and upon the return home, the peace and quiet of one's rural life awaits.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resources are appealing to outdoor enthusiasts and adventure recreationists. The K-IRPC Region has an abundance of great nature offerings: from State Fish & Wildlife Areas in Pulaski, Jasper, Newton, and Starke Counties, to Lakes Freeman and Shafer in White and Carroll Counties; from the Tippecanoe River State Park, to twenty-six magnificently managed Niches Land Trust Nature Preserves in Carroll, Jasper, Newton and Warren Counties, and Bass Lake State Beach on Indiana's second largest natural lake. A sampling of these unique environments and amenities includes: Black Rock, a prominent Mansfield sandstone outcrop rising over 100 feet above the Wabash River, the kayaking rush of the rapids on Big Pine Creek, and the popular canoeing and kayaking experiences of nature's abundance along Wildcat Creek. The K-IRPC Region has a real opportunity to co-promote the access to nature within over 40 parks, fish and wildlife areas, nature preserves, and lakes of the region to attract outdoor enthusiasts and the talent that comes with their presence.



Swinging Bridge over Deer Creek, Carroll County

PARKS, GREENWAYS AND TRAILS

Parks, Greenways and Trails also contribute to "Place Attachment" and talent attraction. Within the K-IRPC region there are active trails groups pursuing trail development, mostly within cities and towns. There are also regional trails. The Panhandle Pathway rail trail has twenty-one miles in active use and is nearing construction of an extension into France Park. Other



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notable trails in existence include the fourteen miles of historic trails in Delphi. Ultimately, the Panhandle Pathway will connect to the two hundred and thirty route miles of the Wabash River Greenway, currently in development in Carroll, Tippecanoe, and Warren Counties.

HISTORIC DOWNTOWNS

Residents seeking the charm and quaintness of small rural communities have many cities and towns to choose from in the region. K-IRPC communities that have cared for and preserved their historic resources, have proven to be more appealing to new residents. They also are resisting the K-IRPC Region's long standing, albeit gradual, population decline. Examples include Rensselaer and Delphi where investments in historic downtown buildings and housing stock have maintained and expanded downtown merchant offerings and entertainment venues. An active and vibrant downtown is often cited as a primary reason for locating one's family in a community. Establishing a National Register Historic District to encompass commercial buildings within a community can be a first step in motivating the private real estate sector to invest in historic resources and benefit from the Federal Historic Tax Credits.

COMMUNITY FESTIVALS

Community festivals are important for bringing those who share the town together in a shared experience. These events also build "Place Attachment", where people continue to choose to live in an area where they are enjoying their day to day lives. Main Street Programs, administered by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, are the primary sponsors of community festivals and downtown events. Existing and popular events within the region include City of Knox July Concerts in the Park, Rensselaer's Little Cousin Jasper Festival, Delphi's Indiana Bacon Festival, and Monticello's Taste of White County. Co-promoting K-IRPC Region community events will spread the word on all the things residents and visitors can do in the area. These efforts promote the region, build resiliency, and help to stem population decline.



Demotte- KVHS Touch of Dutch Festival



Carroll County's Baconfest



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3a. KEY STRATEGIES – Long Term

To build resiliency, the K-IRPC Region must collectively plan into the future in a measured and productive fashion by employing both long term and near-term strategies for resilience. This will be accomplished by tapping into existing network assets to build upon those network capacities while assembling the local leadership willing to tackle key challenges facing the K-IRIPC Region. Long term strategies will address all issues within a regional challenge. This will require stakeholder consensus building, a willingness to craft a comprehensive plan of action, the determination to work the plan and the commitments necessary to utilize available resources to effectively address larger challenges. Near term strategies will address more readily achievable portions of the long-term initiatives by implementing identifiable support programs and existing partnerships within established networks. These near-term efforts will be accomplished by assembling stakeholders with a do it now attitude and an ability to identify and utilize available programs and resources to address the challenge at hand.

Create Regional Roundtable Discussion Groups

The primary purpose for creating Regional Roundtable Discussion Groups is to assemble stakeholders with specific interests in promoting the success of the Region:

- **Employers:** who need a readily available workforce
- **Schools:** who are tasked with educating the future workers and professionals
- **Intermediaries:** who represent important interests in the success of the region, for example:
 - a. Chambers of Commerce
 - b. Main Street Programs
 - c. Faith-Based Institutions
- **Dependent care workers:** who provide employees the freedom from care giving to earn a living

This Group should be populated with leaders passionate about the success of the Region and wholly invested in their respective areas of interest. They will become a critical component of K-IRPC Region initiatives, as they identify needs, brainstorm solutions, tap into networks to solve problems and eventually take on implementation roles in K-IRPC Region strategies toward resilience.

Create Regional Housing Authority

As outlined above, the lack of available, and affordable quality housing is a real challenge to attracting talent and workforce to the region, limiting business growth and expansion. A Regional Housing Authority with

representatives from all eight counties will be charged with: understanding the various housing needs throughout the K-RPC Region; and assessing available state and federal programs for housing assistance, rehabilitation, and new construction, with a goal to determine which state and federal programs are best suited for which communities. Pilot programs will become established in the counties with the most urgent housing needs. The Regional Housing Authority will document lessons learned and expand the pilot program throughout the K-IRPC Region to build upon the success of the pilot projects.

Create Regional Tourism Board

As detailed earlier under K-IRPC Amenities and Attractions, these eight counties have more to offer than one might imagine: from an abundance of state, land trust and local natural resources to parks, greenways, and trails to hike and bike; from historic downtown theaters to community festival experiences, from lakes and waterways to float and fish, the Region has much to do, explore and experience. The key to benefiting from all these unique destinations and experiences is to get the word out in a co-branded fashion through a Regional Tourism Board. State of Indiana enabled legislation provides for the establishment of a hotel tax to fund local tourism needs. The Region would be wise to pool a portion of those funds to promote all the destinations, events, and attractions available to visitors and residents to further enhance “*Place Attachment*”, *talent retention*, and regional resiliency.



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Develop and Enhance Programs to Engage Area Youth

Meaningful engagements with K-IRPC youth is an important tool in building “Place Attachment” to the communities within which they are being raised. Without such meaningful engagement, most youth in the Region will leave soon after graduating high school, seldom returning.

Youth Leadership Development Programs

Youth Leadership Development Programs offer young people, typically between the ages of 15 to 24, the skills and experiences they need to become change agents in their communities while learning leadership skills. Youth leadership programs typically include activities such as travel, intercultural exchange, outdoor education, organizing events, sports, intergenerational knowledge exchange, work experience, public speaking, and life skills development. One example that typically resonates with teenagers are skateboarding programs, where a youth leadership program can provide motivated young people with the chance to take ownership in a project to benefit them and their peers.

Benefits of Youth Leadership Programs

- Providing help in resource limited communities: youth volunteers can run activities at low-cost
- Cultivating role models for your community and within the youth leadership program
- Builds a sense of ownership among participants for each community-based project
- Skill-building for youth exploring interests and preparing to be a leader in the workforce

Apprenticeships

The State of Indiana has invested heavily in Career and Technical Education (CTE) training across the state and in cooperation with local school corporations to introduce high school students to career paths to meet current business needs. In a December 2018 KSM Consulting Report, commissioned by the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, this statement is worth noting:

Indiana has invested heavily in CTE programs around the state to train workers and students for in-demand skills. However, the findings of this report and recent prominent research suggest a waning future demand for those occupation specific skills, plus a shrinking shelf life of nearly all the highly specific training being taught. Scholars also found that “training in reasoning abilities, problem identification and problem solving is increasingly critical” to a worker’s ability to navigate future labor markets to access good, well-paying jobs. CTE can play a valuable role in imparting such abilities, but it requires CTE curriculums do more than connect high school to today’s evolving occupations.

K-IRPC Region Committee for Corporation Sponsored Apprenticeships

Stakeholder engagements with K-IRPC Region employers to inform this resiliency plan provided this success story: Company sponsored apprenticeships coordinated with the local school corporations proved more successful in filling business employment needs than the hiring of students with CTE certificates of completion. It is recommended that major manufacturers from each county populate the committee to pool their resources to arrange for an established technology training and apprenticeship program to meet their specific employment needs. This solution may benefit from a pilot project program based in one or two K-IRPC counties to serve as the model and provide lessons learned before a rollout across the region.

Volunteer Service Programs

One of the most effective ways to build resilience in a community is to engage residents in service to friends, neighbors and even strangers who, for various reasons, are less fortunate, be it a disabled veteran, an individual with an intellectual disability, a visually impaired person, a home bound elder, or a wheelchair user. Imparting one’s abilities in social service to these members of the community provides valuable social engagement experiences, humanizes those who face daily challenges in their lives, and allows more people in the community to become more significant players in the larger community of activities, relationships, stories, and shared experiences.



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The teenage years are a challenging time for youth as they move to adulthood and make critical decisions about their future. Youth leadership programs, apprenticeships, and volunteer service programs, are effective ways to communicate value and purpose to those awkward years and at the same time, build memories and “Place Attachment” that improves talent retention and regional resiliency.

Create Transportation Connectivity Task Force

Reliable and affordable transportation is critically important to support business’s ability to attract and retain talent and maintain workforce availability. The establishment of a K-IRPC Transportation Connectivity Task Force will allow for the K-IRPC Region to plan for and facilitate transportation infrastructure investments throughout the region to improve connectivity between workforce housing and employment, with an initial focus on the region’s greatest areas of need. In addition, the Task Force should also focus on improving access between workforce housing and the shopping centers that provide the goods, and services that all households depend upon for day to day living. The provision of active living transportation facilities between workforce housing, employment centers and shopping districts build additional regional resiliency and provide additional benefits to the K-IRPC Region by promoting healthy habits and improving workforce health; mitigating traffic congestion; and reducing fossil fuel pollution.

Managing Funding and Grant Resources

One of the first assignments for the Task Force will be to advise each K-IRPC community to create a Pavement Management Plan in accordance with INDOT standards. This is a critical first step in being authorized to receive State of Indiana funding through INDOT’s Community Crossings Grant Program. This is the primary means by which Indiana communities fund the maintenance and repairs of streets and public infrastructure. Each K-IRPC community should strive to make application to the grant program at least once per year, if not twice per year, to stay ahead of pavement management needs. The program also allows grant funded infrastructure

upgrades to achieve ADA compliance for accessibility and Safe Routes to Schools investments.

Setting Priorities and Locations

The duties of the Transportation Connectivity Task Force will be broad and wide across the Region. The challenge will be to determine the greatest need and then prioritize capital investments where most needed. Utilizing the *Federal Highway Administration’s Complete Streets Design Guide* as a reference for strategic roadway and street improvements across the region, will provide for infrastructure equity while improving quality of life and quality of place amenities, both of which improve talent retention, talent attraction and regional resiliency.

Establish a K-IRPC Region Ride Sharing Committee

Public transportation to and from employment centers within the K-IRPC Region is not feasible in the foreseeable future. However there are means and methods to improve transportation options that ensure employees can get to work, businesses can expand, and the region can become more resilient. Where clusters of employers are located, for example in commerce parks and industrial centers, it is feasible for employers to pool resources to provide a ride sharing network service to connect employees needing rides to/from work with employees willing to provide rides to/from work for a nominal fee. The cost to employers is nominal and the benefits of a reliable workforce far outweighs associated management expenses. The benefit to employees is that their resources are being more wisely used and allocated, ultimately providing them with more economic stability. This plan recommends the establishment of a K-IRPC Region Ride Sharing Committee populated with major employers from each county to evaluate and pilot a Ride Share program within the region for broader use in the future.



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The following ridesharing resources can be found at:

www.transportation.gov/mission/health/ride-sharing-programs

The U.S. DOT [Ridesharing Options Analysis and Practitioner's Toolkit](#) provides an overview of current ridesharing trends for public agencies seeking to create ridesharing programs tailored to meet the needs of their constituency. The report also includes an index of public and private entities engaged in ridesharing.

[Carpool Incentive Programs: Implementing Commuter Benefits as one of the Nation's Best Workplaces for Commuters](#) explains the how-to details and benefits of establishing a carpool incentive program from the perspective of an employer.

The [Ridesharing Institute](#) site provides archival information on the institute's applied research, webinar series, and links to other research and resources.



3b. KEY STRATEGIES – Near Term

Develop a K-IRPC Region Trails Connectivity Plan

Feedback during stakeholder engagements provided a high level of interest in alternative transportation facilities, trails, and greenways. These investments are also known to increase talent attraction and retention, building resiliency in the region. This plan recommends the creation of a K-IRPC Trails Committee, populated with trail advocates from each county, to commission a K-IRPC Region Trails Connectivity Plan that utilizes the Federal Highway Administration's Complete Streets approach to facilities design: <https://highways.dot.gov/complete-streets>. These standards promote multi-modal transportation facilities for those in vehicles, on bikes, walking and in wheelchairs, with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. The Trails Connectivity Plan should focus on bicycle and pedestrian facilities with direct connections to housing clusters, dependent care facilities, employment centers, local schools, regional destinations, campgrounds, nature preserves, parks, and historic downtowns. To build that connectivity, various facilities will be necessary and will include side paths adjacent to roads, fully separated greenways, in town urban shared facilities utilizing "sharrows", and rural signed bike routes.

Implement a Coordinated Trails Wayfinding System

The provision of a **K-IRPC Region Trails coordinated wayfinding system** will improve visitor's experiences and introduce them to new attractions and destinations as they walk and bike the trails in the region. An additional focus of this plan should prioritize connectivity with the existing Panhandle Pathway and the emerging Wabash River Greenway, a destination recreation trail along ninety Wabash River miles in Carroll and Warren Counties.

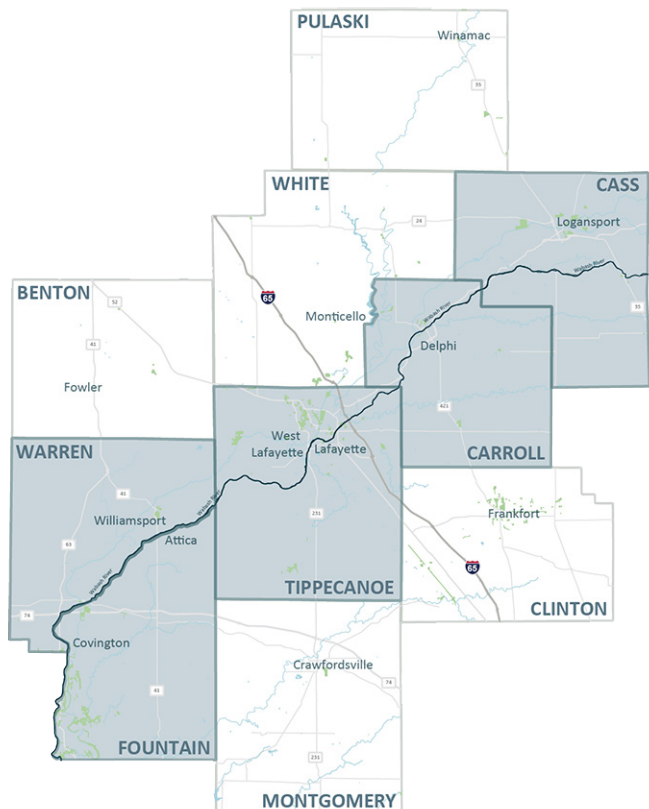
Prepare County-Wide Transportation Safety Plans

As part of the K-IRPC Region Trails Connectivity Plan, the Task Force should set as a goal to annually aid interested K-IRPC counties for the development of transportation safety plans. These plans will provide opportunities to assess and address growing transportation needs around the region. They will also identify opportunities to expand non-motorized transportation in the region to support "Active Living Lifestyles" and improve workforce health with a focus on implementing the K-IRPC Region Trails Connectivity Plan with public safety standards woven seamlessly into the system. The above referenced



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Federal Highway Administration's Complete Streets Guide is a reliable reference for incorporating safety into constructed facilities.



Area of Planned Wabash River Greenway

Address the K-IRPC Region's Lack of Affordable and Available Housing

There exists a lack of affordable housing in the K-IRPC Region, and existing affordable housing programs have long waitlists. This represents a threat to regional businesses' ability to recruit workers- as employees are likely to only accept an offer of employment in communities where they can afford the cost of living. Existing housing stock has been generally trending from owner occupied to rental units, with larger historic homes being subdivided into apartments. Rented homes also generally are not maintained as well as owner occupied homes, further degrading the housing stock available for residents seeking affordable quality housing.

Develop a K-IRPC Regional Housing Authority

Talent attraction, talent retention, business expansions and business attraction are negatively impacted by the lack of affordable and available housing in the region. Area stakeholders, including employers, agencies, elected officials, and intermediaries were vocal about this challenge during engagement and outreach for this resiliency plan. Therefore, a primary recommendation is to establish a K-IRPC Regional Housing Authority populated with area stakeholders most impacted by this issue. The Housing Authority duties would be to commission and guide the development of a Comprehensive Housing Inventory and Analysis to aggregate the necessary information needed to determine next steps in address the issue. Upon completion of this study, the Housing Authority would be prepared to pursue the most appropriate and currently available state and federal housing development programs and tools to begin the process of providing the housing types to support economic growth within the region.

Commission a Comprehensive Housing Inventory and Analysis

The first step in addressing the region's affordable and available housing challenge is to perform a *Comprehensive Housing Inventory and Analysis*. Utilizing the outcomes and findings of this study, K-IRPC will be able to identify the areas of greatest need where first efforts would be focused. Housing challenges can then be addressed by conducting one or two pilot projects within one or two counties- of greatest need- to seek solutions, initiate measures to address the need and document successes for implementation throughout the K-IRPC Region. This housing inventory and analysis will also identify state and federal programs that are suited to meeting K-IRPC regional housing needs.

The IU Center for Rural Engagement (IUCRE) produced a Housing Ready Toolkit that can serve as a reference and guide to address housing affordability and availability. The Toolkit can be referenced at: <https://rural.indiana.edu/impact/housing/housing-ready-toolkit.html>.

The toolkit was developed to be a partner in the Uplands Housing Study noted below. The model can be utilized anywhere in Indiana and works across the



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state with Indiana's property tax codes. The Indiana Uplands Region of eleven counties has completed a comprehensive regionwide housing study that complies with HUD/IHCDA standards for funding programs. This study could be a model for addressing housing issues within the entire K-IRPC Region. It can be found at: <https://regionalopportunityinc.org/housing>.

Housing Development Programs administered by IHCDA

The Comprehensive Housing Inventory and Analysis will identify state and federal housing programs that the Housing Authority can use to promote private developer assistance in meeting K-IRPC Region housing needs.

Current programs include:

HOUSING TAX CREDIT PROGRAMS

As of March 15th, 2022, there are now three housing tax credit programs that can be utilized to incentivize the private development marketplace to meet the affordable and available housing needs of the K-IRPC Region. Completion of the Comprehensive Housing Inventory and Analysis for the entire K-IRPC Region, would be an effective tool to demonstrate regional housing needs and bring awareness of such needs to the private development marketplace.

FEDERAL LOW INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDIT (LIHTC)

The Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCDA) publishes a list of agencies annually that are qualified to complete housing studies for federal LIHTC projects. These studies only pertain to a potential development and are used to verify the viability of projects for which a developer is seeking tax credit incentives.

INDIANA AFFORDABLE & WORKFORCE HOUSING TAX CREDIT

On March 15th, 2022, Indiana enacted a state Affordable and Workforce Housing Tax Credit (the "Affordable Housing Tax Credit") program (like the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program) to incentivize the development of affordable housing in the state. The Affordable Housing Tax Credit will be available for certain low-income housing projects receiving a federal 4% LIHTC and will be claimed over a period of five taxable years. The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) will consider applications and issue eligibility statements

on and after July 1, 2023. Applicants that receive an eligibility statement may begin claiming credits against their Indiana state tax liability for taxable years beginning as soon as January 1, 2024. To be eligible, an applicant must own a qualified project or be an affiliated entity that is designated by the owner of a qualified project. In order for a project to be deemed a "qualified project" for purposes of the Affordable Housing Tax Credit program, such project must be:

1. a "qualified project" for purposes of the LIHTC program
2. located in Indiana
3. financed by tax exempt bonds subject to the private activity bond volume cap
4. and eligible for a federal 4% LIHTC

HISTORIC REHABILITATION TAX CREDITS

When paired with low-income housing tax credits or new markets tax credits, Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits are an effective tool to motivate private developers to assist with bringing affordable housing to rural Indiana. To capture the benefits of two tax credit programs, the partnership agreements allocating benefits between entities involved in the transaction will need to be carefully structured to meet governance requirements.

INDIANA WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM

The State of Indiana offers assistance in weatherizing existing housing stock to provide energy efficient residences to those in need. The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) provides energy conservation measures to reduce the utility bills of low-income Hoosiers across the state. The program offers clients a permanent solution to reducing their energy bills by making their homes more energy efficient. The United States Department of Energy (DOE) allocates funds to IHCDA for distribution to local agencies to perform weatherization work.

<https://www.in.gov/ihcda/homeowners-and-renters/weatherizationenergy-conservation/>

Establish a K-IRPC Region Broadband Task Force

There can be no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has permanently changed many aspects in how society operates, conducts business, procures goods, and communicates. The disparities between a community's



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ability to pivot quickly during the shutdown across most sectors or, as was more often the case in rural communities, come to a stalled state of existence, laid nearly entirely in the community's access to broadband connectivity: the ability to conduct work, school, and social media- virtually. According to the Federal Communications Commission's 2018 Report, forty-Two per cent of Hoosiers in rural areas do not have access to wired broadband internet speeds of 25/3 Mbps. The importance of building K-IRPC Region broadband connectivity cannot be understated.

The State of Indiana has established "**Indiana Broadband**" through the Office of the Lieutenant Governor to provide statewide assistance and guidance in pursuit of broadband connectivity to underserved and unserved areas. Utilizing the clearly prescribed ten step process outlined on "**Indiana Broadband**" website, this plan recommends that K-IRPC establish a region-wide **Broad Band Leadership Task Force**, populated with region stakeholders from each county for whom this connectivity is important. The Task Force members would become advisors to their counties of residence, providing guidance to county communities in establishing their own community based **Broadband Leadership Task Force**.

Conduct a K-IRPC Region Study of Broadband Coverage

K-IRPC should undertake a regionwide study of broadband coverage focusing on:

- Internet service area coverage and gaps, with contacts for all current providers
- Existing obstacles to broadband deployment and their remedies
- Existing broadband points of entry into the K-IRPC Region for service expansion
- Building partnerships with broadband providers to connect to K-IRPC communities
- Pursuit of state and federal funding to incentivize service provider interest in expanding broadband deployments in the region.

"**Indiana Broadband**" clearly defined ten step process:

1. Create your Community Broadband Leadership Group or Task Force
2. Become an Indiana Broadband Ready Community

3. Conduct a Broadband Plan or Feasibility Study
4. Engage with Providers to encourage Investment
5. Showcase Incentives and Benefits of Broadband Expansion
6. Increase the Broadband Adoption Rate in your Community (subscriptions)
7. Compile Inventory of Public and Private Resources /Assets
8. Gather Data: Surveys, Mapping and Eligibility
9. Identify available State and Federal Funding Sources
10. Engage with Partners to Increase Local Workforce in Anticipation of Buildout

www.in.gov/indianabroadband/steps-to-success

Create a Regional Tourism Action Plan

As outlined above, the K-IRPC Region has a varied collection of appealing destinations: unique beach, farm, and entertainment experiences; verdant natural resources, parks, and trails; as well as historic downtowns and community festivals to appeal to residents and visitors alike. This plan recommends the creation of a Regional Tourism Action Plan led by a K-IRPC Tourism Committee of chamber and tourism representatives from each county with guidance by K-IRPC administrators.

80 of Indiana's 92 counties have instituted the Innkeepers Tax, which generates revenues on overnight accommodations for short term stays. Business enterprises obligated to pay the Innkeepers Tax, depending upon county ordinance provisions, can include any or all the following: hotels, motels, lodges, ranches, villas, apartments, cottages, houses, apartments, condominiums, bed and breakfast establishments, vacation homes, houseboats, trailers, resorts, gymnasiums, coliseums, banquet halls, ballrooms, arenas, or other similar accommodations regularly offered for rent as lodging. If all eight K-IRPC counties instituted the tax and dedicated a portion of the resulting revenue stream to the K-IRPC Tourism Committee, an actionable Regional Tourism Action Plan could be commissioned to benefit the region.



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The scope for the Action Plan should, at a minimum, include the following:

- 1. An Inventory of Regional Natural Resources and Park Amenities:** This inventory should identify all state parks and preserves, land trust parcels, and park amenities in the region with details about the facilities, maintenance needs and opportunities for amenity expansions.
- 2. Elevate K-IRPC Region Attractions with Strategic Enhancements:** Using documentation from the inventory phase, the Tourism Committee should prioritize regional amenity capital investments for implementation, based upon the potential for such investments to elevate the attractions appeal and attract more visitors and residents to the region.



Indiana Beach

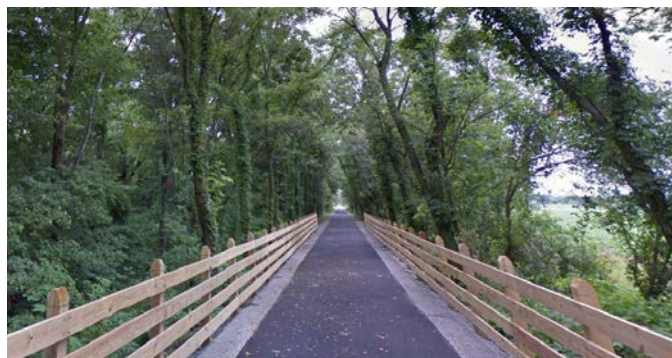
- 3. Develop Historic Downtown Redevelopment Action Plans:** The importance of investments in architectural resources, historic buildings, and people friendly streetscapes across our state and in the K-IRPC Region are numerous, and these investments increase tourist traffic. Delphi's recent investments in Carroll County Courthouse Square façade restorations, streetscape improvements and building renovations has brought new life and vitality to the city. The City Hall Opera House restoration has been an outstanding success as an entertainment and events center. In 2017, it took the coveted Cook Cup Award, top honors for historic preservation from Indiana Landmarks. Even much smaller rural Indiana communities can benefit from such investments, like Fowler, Indiana, where the volunteer community came together to resurrect their Fowler Theater from ruin. It is once again a vibrant community asset and hub of activity, prompting a restaurant to open across the street. The Fowler Theater was recognized by Indiana Landmarks in 2016, winning the Cook Cup

Award. To understand the depth of historic restoration value in preserving viable rural communities and promoting tourism, follow this link to the Fowler Theater story: <https://youtu.be/FI32zwGcnZo>.

This plan recommends that K-IRPC administrators initiate a program to develop **Historic Downtown Redevelopment Action Plans** with prioritized action items for one to two K-IRPC Region communities per year. Focus items within these Action Plans should consider the following:

- Pedestrian oriented streetscapes with shade trees
- Repurposing and restoring historic buildings with street level retail storefronts
- Design of an outdoor community events area (perhaps using downtown streets)
- Provisions for a locally funded façade grant program
- Incentives for outdoor dining, co-working space, culinary kitchen, and interior events space
- Trails and greenway connectivity from community neighborhoods into downtown
- Building renovations providing affordable housing apartments utilizing available tax credit programs

- 4. Integrate Regional Trails into the K-IRPC Region Trails Connectivity Plan:** Upon completion of the K-IRPC Region Trails Connectivity Plan, the Trails Committee should prioritize top trail projects to expand connectivity with a focus on connecting to regional trails, both those existing and in development. These include the Panhandle Pathway, Wabash River Greenway, Great American Rail Trail/Cardinal Greenway, and the American Discovery Trail, all which appeal to recreational tourists and pass through the K-IRPC Region.



K-IRPC Destination Recreation Trail