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Jobs and Boosting Local Firms Top Agenda at Regional Development Authority Quarterly Board Meeting

Construction is moving ahead of schedule at the Gary Chicago International Airport, and the Regional Development Authority is working to make sure the people and companies of Northwest Indiana are the ones who benefit.

Crown Point (July 27, 2011) – New jobs are being created and business is being generated for Northwest Indiana firms thanks to Regional Development Authority (RDA)-funded projects in Gary, Hammond, Whiting, Portage and elsewhere, the Board of Directors of the RDA was told at its quarterly meeting today.

“We are putting people to work now, and in doing so we are also laying the foundation for future economic growth,” said RDA Chairman Leigh Morris. “When these projects are completed, especially the expansion of the runway at Gary Chicago International Airport, you will really see the region’s economic engine rev up.”

Briefings on the progress of both construction at Gary Chicago International Airport and the development of a “Buy Northwest Indiana” policy for RDA-funded projects highlighted today’s meeting. The RDA has provided \$30 million to Gary Chicago International Airport as part of a \$150 million project to lengthen its main runway. The most recent phase of construction, involving the relocation of railroad tracks and the construction of three bridges, broke ground May 25th. Since then, airport officials

reported that two of four construction contracts had been awarded, and that the remaining two would be put out for bid in August.

The airport also plans to bid out construction of a new electrical vault this fall, ahead of schedule. In response to questions, airport officials added that the two contracts awarded so far were either at or below estimated costs.

In fact, things are moving so smoothly and quickly at the airport that the Board approved a request from the airport to expand the scope of the grant funding provided by the RDA to include bringing in nationally recognized airport and aviation planning consultancy Landrum & Brown for technical support.

“The RDA is using Landrum & Brown for technical support as we work on specific business development and time priority issues to ensure that when the runway extension is completed all of the good things that will enable the airports successes in terms of business development, charter service, freight logistics, passenger services, are addressed” said Morris. “We have a motto guiding our efforts – more planes will be seen by 2013 – our target is for the Airport to be in a good position for successful operations.”

In addition to Landrum & Brown, airport executives also noted that the airport’s Board recently approved negotiations to hire a construction management company to keep all the ongoing projects flowing smoothly.

During the standing-room-only board meeting, the RDA Board heard from several members of the Northwest Indiana Federation, who voiced their concern that work at the airport, and at other projects funded by the RDA around Northwest Indiana, wasn’t employing enough people from the hardest-hit communities in the region. The Federation asked the Board to consider the development of a formal Regional Community Benefits Agreement.

Notably, the RDA was already moving in the direction of encouraging local participation with a new “Buy Northwest Indiana” policy and the creation of system to track how many people employed on RDA-funded projects are also residents of Lake and Porter counties. The tracking system is expected to begin producing solid data before the end of the year.

The Board adopted the “Buy Northwest Indiana” policy with one modification suggested by Chairman Morris: that not only should grantees need to report on their progress buying locally during and after projects, but that it should be required as part of the grant application that grantees outline their strategies for ensuring they do business with Northwest Indiana firms.

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About the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority

Established in 2005 through a bipartisan effort including Governor Mitchell E. Daniels, Congressman Peter J. Visclosky, key state legislators and local elected officials, the RDA is quasi-governmental, development entity entrusted to make public investment decisions within a regional framework for supporting catalytic infrastructure projects and inducing private sector investment. For more information, visit <http://www.in.gov/rda/>