Back in the spring of 2011, a number of northern Wisconsin Counties started meeting in Rhinelander to discuss declining rail service across Northern Wisconsin and specifically the rumor that Canadian National (CN) may abandon the rail line running east/west along Hwy 8 through seven northern counties. By-laws were created and initially eight counties passed resolutions to join. The Northwoods Rail Transit Commission was officially recognized by WI-DOT in May 2012. It is the largest of seven such Wisconsin rail commissions.

Each member county appoints two commissioners, typically county board members, and in some cases a county economic development director. The group crafted its mission early on: to sustain and enhance safe, reliable and efficient rail service critical to the businesses, communities and economies in northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Each member county also contributed $500 to obtain administrative services from North Central Regional Planning Commission (CUPPAD), and Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning and Development Commission (EUPRPD). The end result will be a new form of service delivery that regionalizes economic development services and operates locally out of existing Michigan Works! service centers in each county. The concept is illustrated below.

The outcomes of these meetings will be evident in the Western U.P. Regional Prosperity Plan.

In addition, specialized subcommittee meetings have explored issues related to transportation and education. The outcomes of these meetings will be evident in the Western U.P. Regional Prosperity Plan.

The Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) continues to move forward on the Regional Prosperity Initiative, having held two Stakeholder meetings and three Advisory Committee meetings. There has been much discussion and collaboration amongst the Economic Development entities in the Upper Peninsula, such as Michigan Workforce, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance (KEDA), MTEC SmartZone, WUPPDR, Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD), and Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning and Development Commission (EUPRPD). The end result will be a new form of service delivery that regionalizes economic development services and operates locally out of existing Michigan Workforce service centers in each county. The concept is illustrated below.

In addition, specialized subcommittee meetings have explored issues related to transportation and education. The outcomes of these meetings will be evident in the Western U.P. Regional Prosperity Plan.
The WUPPDR staff is currently working on a new round of MSHDA programs for WUPPDR commission county allocations for Houghton, Keweenaw, Baraga and Ontonagon Counties. The agency is made up of engineers, planners, and other stakeholders in bicycle safety and mobility who meet quarterly in U.P. locations connected by videoconferencing.

Each meeting includes detailed discussions about selected local transportation projects, such as bicycle paths and related road modifications. Also included is a roundtable discussion about current non-motorized activities in all participating areas. Current Western U.P. highlights include an active bicycle and pedestrian committee in Hancock and major reconstruction of Highway U.S. 2 in Ironwood.

The regional commission will promote relationship-building and partnerships in addition to improving education to reduce crashes among pedestrians and bicyclists in the Upper Peninsula.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) recently formed a Superior Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee for the U.P. The committee is made up of engineers, planners, and other stakeholders in bicycle safety and mobility who meet quarterly in U.P. locations connected by videoconferencing.

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UPEDA Holds Quarterly Meeting Focused on Energy

The separation of many communities in the Upper Peninsula can present problems as far as getting affordable energy is concerned, and that other energy topics were the focus of the quarterly meeting of the Upper Peninsula Economic Development Alliance May 23 at the Michigan Technological University Advanced Technology Development Center in Houghton.

The Governor wants whatever energy systems developed for the state to be reliable, Brader said. "We need to make sure we have enough reliability at all times," she said.

Brader said, "It's important for the distribution of electricity in the U.P. to find a way to keep operating the Presque Isle Power Plant in Marquette, which plant owner Wisconsin Electric Power Co. wants to sell." Although the Governor is considering alternative energy sources in the near future, large power plants such as Public Infrastructure Partners (PIP) are needed to provide power for the U.P.

The cost of energy in Michigan is 6 percent higher than the average for the rest of the country.

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