

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission

2025

With



Reconnecting regional rail,
ports and intermodal
infrastructure



Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure Accelerator

Applicant	Dale Kupczyk – Northwoods Rail Transit Commission Wisconsin Vice Chair
Sponsor	Northwoods Rail Transit Commission
Location	North Central Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission 210 McClellan St. Suite 210, Wausau WI 54403 715-849-5510 ext. 308 / northwoodsrail@ncwrpc.org
Region of Designation	Great Lakes States
Congressional Districts	All Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois and Indiana
Category	Multi-State Corridor
Budget	\$1,500,000

June 25, 2025

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1. Applicant

A. Northwoods Rail Transit Commission History

The **Northwoods Rail Transit Commission** (NWRCT) is one of five rail transit commissions in the state of Wisconsin. It was established by State Statute 66.0201 in 2012 and was formed through a joint intergovernmental agreement between Oneida County and the following 21 counties in the bi-state area. Wisconsin Counties: Ashland, Clark, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Lincoln, Marathon, Marinette, Oconto, Onieda, Price and Rusk Counties. Michigan Counties include Daraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Marquette, Menominee and Ontonagon. Clark County joined the commission in 2024 and this [Star News](#) article summarizes the current need to revitalize the rail network.

The NWRCT was launched after the Wisconsin Central, a regional railroad, was sold to the Canadian National, a Class 1 railroad. The commission's focus is on maintaining and upgrading freight rail service in northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and the regional railroad connectors that help support the economic competitiveness of the Great Lakes States. The transit commission authority is board and allows for the

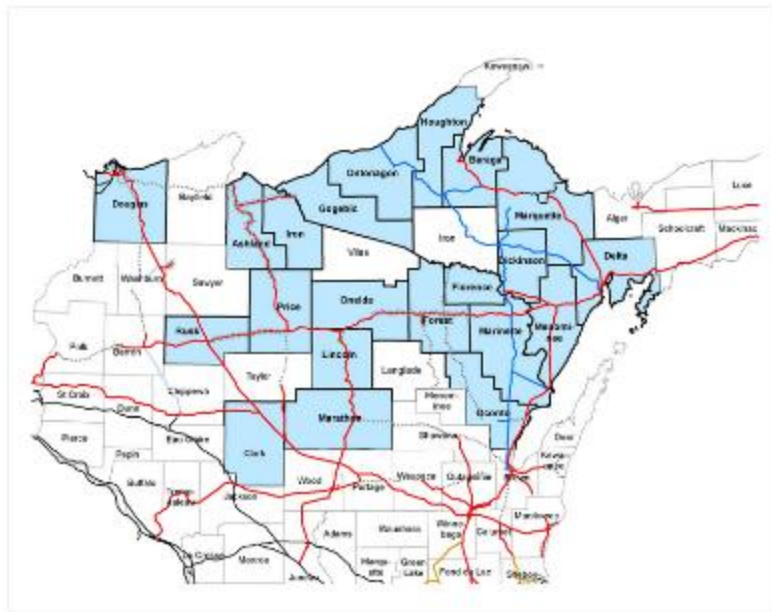


Figure 1 Northwoods Rail Transit Commission Map Showing Red Railroad Corridors and Blue Member Counties

development and preservation of passenger rail systems. In recent years there has been significant interest in connection to, and the development of intermodal services provided by the Class 1 railroads and also the development and support of bringing ocean containers back to the Great Lakes. The map in [Figure 1](#) shows the rail lines and route structures that are within the jurisdiction of Northwoods Rail transit commission.

The Mission of the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission is: ***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.***

B. Relationships

NWRTC has a strong relationship with the following organizations in [Figure 2](#):

The link below describes the family of rail organizations aimed at supporting the stranded rail assets in the Great Lakes region. <https://www.centralcorridors.com/>

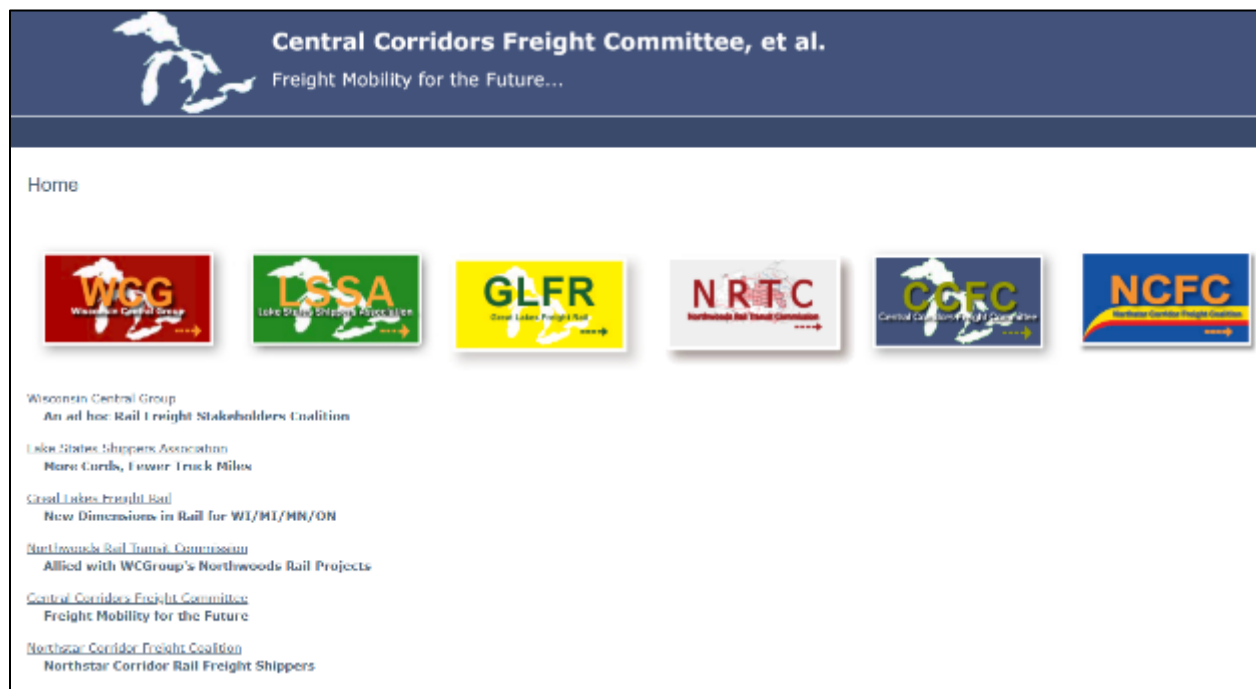


Figure 2 Wisconsin Family of Rail Development Organizations

[North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission](#)

Provides administrative and financial support for the organization. John Duncan Varda is with DeWitt LLP and has been an advisor and historian for the Commission. The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) is a public agency dedicated to providing professional planning services to member local governments. They provide both local and regional assistance in the areas of economic development, geographic information systems, intergovernmental cooperation, land use planning and transportation. The NCWRPC was the night regional planning commission created under Wisconsin Statute s.66.0309. Since 1973 the purpose of this NCWRPC has been to prepare

plans for the physical development of the Region and its communities to conduct research to serve as a data center, to serve as a forum for communication, cooperation and coordination among federal, state, regional and local interests to provide technical services to its members. More information is available in the hyperlink to the title above.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission Accomplishments:

- **2023 Wisconsin FRIIP Intermodal Study**

[The Wisconsin Central Group](#)

The Lake States Shippers Group, the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission, the Great Lakes Freight Rail group, the NorthStar Corridor Freight Coalition and Central Corridor's Freight Committee were all organized by John Ducan Varda with the DeWitt law firm from Madison, WI. In recent years after the Watco purchase of the CN Northern Wisconsin lines the Lake States Shippers and the Wisconsin Central Group merged. The title of this section contains a hyperlink to a detailed organizational history.

[Lake States Shipper's Association](#)

The purpose of the Lake State Shipper's Association is to advance the safety, efficiency and competitiveness of freight logistics and the economic development and wellbeing of the people and communities of the Great Lakes Forests Region. Members predominantly are engaged in logging, paper mills, logistics and transportation. Memberships and sponsors support this association.

The Objective of this organization is to facilitate establishing supply chain visibility for, and optimization of, and access to sustainable rail competition for the transportation of: (a) wood fiber from stump and woods to mills and other consumer locations; and (b) all forest products and other commodities trucked over the road to, from and within the Great Lakes Forests Region. Rail service is essential for the forest products industry which is essentially a commodity business where inputs are relatively cheap and transportation for finished goods impacts the accessible markets for the end products. The forest products industry has been struggling in recent years. Wisconsin remains the top paper-producing state in the country, but jobs in the industry have declined by 73 percent since 2001 to nearly 7,000 employees in 2024, according to the [Wisconsin Council on Forestry](#). And a 2021 survey found that nearly one-third of logging companies expect to go out of business in the next five years unless low-cost transportation options can help them access new markets at a lower cost. Title for this section contains a hyperlink to more information about LSSA.

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission

The Northwoods Rail Transit Commission was established in 2012. The title of this report details the history and activities of this group, aiming to save, connect and rehabilitate an important transportation resource the railroads provide. This group is advocating for rail reinvestment to support the forest products industry which is the primary regional employer. The State resources, both financial and institutional knowledge, are limited so NWRTC has responded by funding a number of studies to understand how supporting railroads and log landings in rural areas may be more efficient in an effort to expand market reach. This commission sponsored two TIGER grants and was encouraged to reapply but was unable to secure the match needed. The TIGER grants proposed to purchase a fleet of 100 log cars to replace aged equipment which had reached a forty-year life, and milestone where the equipment either must undergo a significant rebuild or be scrapped. CN supported this effort in an effort to keep their log landings open for business. Without rail cars moving the pulp wood the paper industry fell into hard times and experienced a variety of mergers and acquisitions themselves. Darryl Landeau an employee of North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission is an active Northwoods Rail Transit Authority administrator. A summary of their work can be found in the link above and in this summary of news stories. <https://www.wxpr.org/tags/northwood-rail-transit-commission>

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission Accomplishments and funded studies

- Digital Survey
- Freight Study
- (2) Tiger Grants

The Great Lakes Freight Rail Group

The newest entity in the family of rail coalition supporters is the Great Lake Freight Rail Group. It was established in 2020 shortly after the Canadian National's announcement of the Wisconsin-Northern Michigan Branch Line Proposed Divestiture. This group is working hard to preserve more than 650 miles of rail in Wisconsin which connects Michigan and Minnesota forests to paper mills in Wisconsin. This group is partnering with NWRTC and will be the active manager of the RIA grant award. A partnership agreement can be found in the Letters of Support Attachment. More information about this group is contained in the hyperlink title for this section of the application.

Libby Ogard is an executive director of the Great Lakes Freight Rail Group and is a member of the following State Advisory Committee and has been a frequent presenter.

- Wisconsin Freight Advisory Committee and Wisconsin DOT
- Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee and Minnesota DOT
- Illinois Freight Advisory Committee and Illinois DOT

C. Key Personnel

Libby Ogard was the author of the two Tiger Grants that NWRTC submitted and was the successful grant writer for a \$20 million rail and intermodal project at the Port of Duluth and a \$36 million project at the Port of Milwaukee which supported unit train service and a transload operation for export. Ms. Ogard has won state grants for the Port of Cleveland and for industrial park expansion in Wrightstown, WI to support the forest products industry. In 2023 Ms. Ogard completed an intermodal terminal analysis for the BI-State region of MN and WI and identified public private partnership opportunities to clear Double Stack Container clearance obstructions inhibiting international containerization opportunities in the region. Libby brings University and rail projects to the five-state region to promote predevelopment activities to improve project application competitiveness in the five-state region.

John Varda is a lawyer who has assembled the family of transportation organizations to accelerate stakeholder engagement to preserve and reconnect stranded rail assets in the Great Lakes Region. John has worked in multiple states within the Great Lakes region focusing on the improvement and reconnection of transportation networks. John will be the liaison between the Wisconsin Central Group and the Lake States Shippers Association and the regional stakeholders representing the Forest products, logistics, marine and rail activities.

Darryl Landeau an employee of the North Central Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission and has managed federal and state grants and application submittals. Darryl will provide a limited oversight role as an advisor to ensure the cooperative agreement is properly set up for the Great Lakes Freight Rail organization to administer.

Dale Kupczyk is the Wisconsin Vice Chair of the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission and will provide an oversight role as a liaison between the Great Lakes Freight Rail activities and the Big-state Northwoods Rail Transit Commission.

D. Organizational Structure

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission is the lead application for the RIA application.

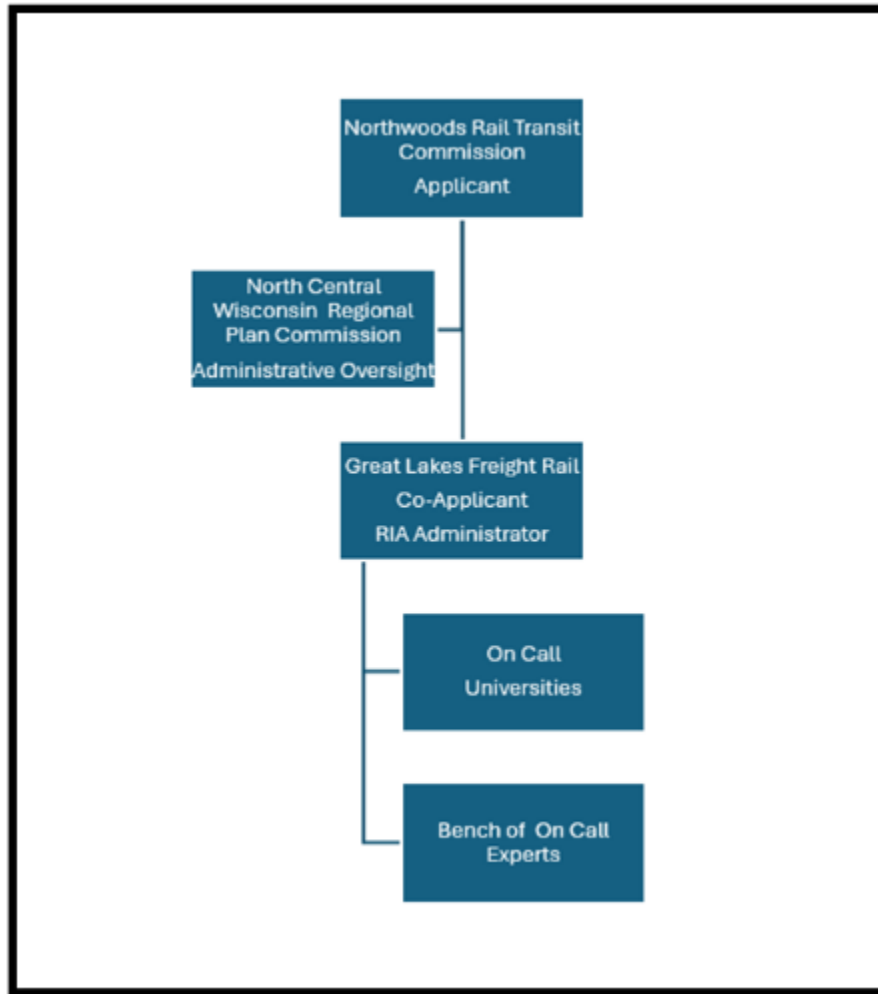


Figure 3 Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Organization Diagram

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission is partnering with Great Lakes Freight Rail Group, who will be the active RIA administrator. Northwoods Rail transit commission will provide oversight and minimal administrative assistance.

We have letters of support from Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan Departments of Transportation who support this effort to expand rail development activities with an emphasis of reconnecting stranded

rural assets and the development of intermodal containerization opportunities in the State. See Letters of Support Attachment.

We have also received letters of support from regional Universities to support education, outreach and technical support services:

- University of Wisconsin Superior
- Michigan State University
- Michigan Tech University
- Northwestern University

- DePaul University Chicago
- University of Michigan

Other Universities may be included based on the needs of the RIA applicants on an as needed basis.

A number of subject matter experts will be assembled based on project development needs and this group of experts will report to the Great Lakes Freight Rail RIA.

2. Description of Geographic/Jurisdictional Region

The proposed RIA will encompass the entire five states in the Great Lakes Region. These states include Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, the key forest products states represent a diverse collection of 1950's port, terminals and short lines in the states of Illinois and Indiana. See [figure 4](#). Due to massive rail consolidations after deregulation in the 1980's and further mergers and acquisitions over 45 years there are many stranded assets. After Class 1 precision scheduled railroading initiatives in the last 5 years, rail networks have been streamlined reducing access for regional users and lost connections.



Figure 4 Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure RIA

The North American Class 1 rail network meets in Chicago and is focused on long haul rail service. When freight interchanges between these carriers each shipment must be profitable. Yet the exchanges are complicated and expensive. Many existing railroads are at or near capacity in the urban core of Chicago. Re-establishing short line connections between Class 1 carriers and short lines could solve regional rail bottlenecks and could be a substitute

for regional trucks. Intermodal opportunities to extend rail economics to rural regions with 500 miles of Chicago are also of interest to the RIA. This may involve terminal development and short haul rail networks. Great Lakes Port Containerization is of interest to Port of Monroe, MI, Ports of Indiana, Port of Milwaukee and Chicago yet there are no intermodal connections to these ports. This is another opportunity for RIA. Other short lines within

Illinois and Indiana seek opportunities to support export ag via rail to Lake and River terminals and are exploring intermodal service options.

A. Designation

The Great Lakes Infrastructure Accelerator seeks to support the “Other” category for a Regional Designation as a Transportation Corridor/Network. While Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan may support most forest products producers in the nation. The short lines that support this freight must make connections to the Class 1 carriers. If short lines can get to Chicago there are connections to all six North American rail carriers. This represents a tremendous opportunity for regional rail carriers to connect to reach Canada, Mexico, Coastal ports and 140,000 miles of rail connected intermodal terminals, and rail served producers and distributors.

This RIA is interested in an RRIF loan opportunity in Rochelle, which is a short distance from the Wisconsin border and provides Intermodal connections to the Pacific Northwest

The Great Lakes Basin Railroad represents an opportunity to move freight around the congested CREATE project by providing a single rail service connecting to each Class 1 carrier outside of the congested Chicago core. This carrier connects Kingsbury, IN, to Janesville, WI and could be a great connection for the Great Lakes regional cargo movement.

To support Great Lakes ports and terminals containerization interest investments will need to be made to increase efficiency and productivity.

This region supports.

2023	Number of Railroads	Class 1 RR Miles	Shortline Miles	% Short Line Miles	Total Miles	000 Carloads
Wisconsin	9	2801	1099	0.39236	3900	730.4
Michigan	29	1839	2223	1.208809	4062	1047.4
Indiana	45	3127	1820	0.582028	4947	1373.3
Illinois	48	7712	1824	0.236515	9536	7839.5
Minnesota	19	4435	1063	0.239684	5498	2172.8
	150	19,914	8,029		27,943	13,163

Source: AAR Data

B. Common Interests

The common interest of this collection of stakeholders is the connection of stranded assets and the revitalization of short line railroads, freight terminals, inland ports, intermodal and transit-oriented development for the movement of passengers and cargo in modern efficient and productive ways. There are many examples of forgotten networks and connections which if rehabilitated to modern use case standards could provide public benefits such as congestion reduction, highway maintenance reduction, extended economic reach, job creation and fuel saving strategies.

While rail and marine cargo network development is complex many of the projects in this region share common barriers. The geography of this region allows for a standardization of approach to pre-development work and provides the RIA an opportunity to leverage outreach and education to a larger group of users than one-off solutions.

Another commonality is this RIA will focus on rural areas where support resources are scarce, and budgets are small. These rural areas tend to produce bulk products, and outbound shipments tend to exceed inbound freight volumes resulting in an equipment imbalance. Helping rural project applicants understand basic freight economics and performance measures can help identify project attributes to improve competitive discretionary grant applications.

C. Support of R.O.U.T.E.S Initiatives

The five Great Lakes States in this RIA application are predominately rural, each with one large urban center, while the rest of the state relies on agriculture/forestry and light manufacturing. The Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative prioritizes the needs of rural America by advancing rural transportation policy and supporting rural and Tribal communities that face challenges relating to transportation safety, mobility, and economic development. The ROUTES Initiative addresses the transportation infrastructure needs of rural communities by developing user-friendly tools and information, aggregating DOT resources, and providing direct technical assistance to better connect rural communities with the funding, financing, and outreach resources available.

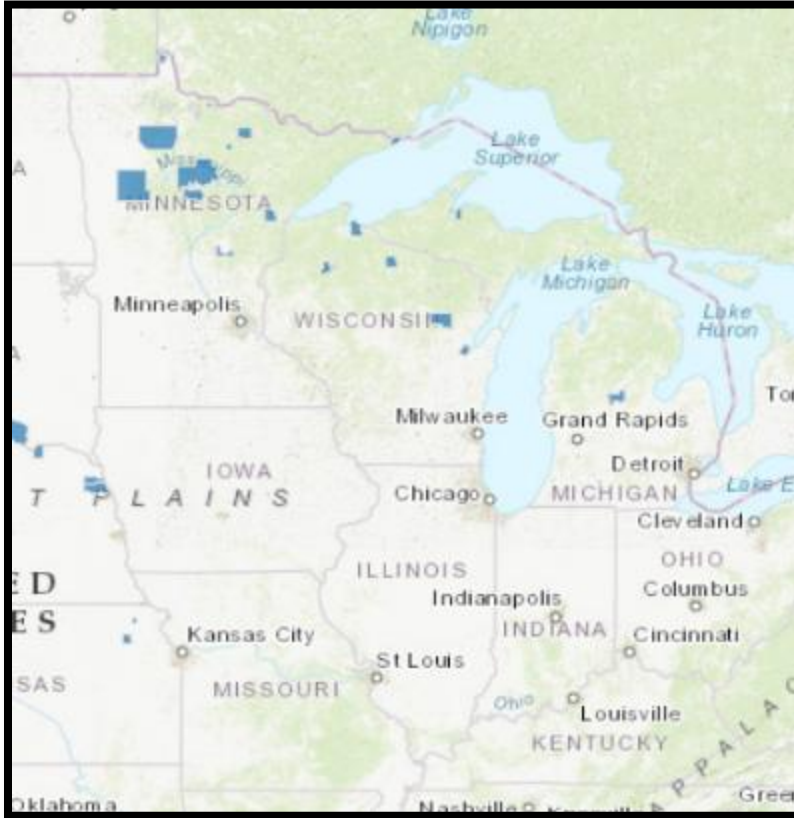


Figure 5 US Domestic Sovereign Nations Land Areas of Federally Recognized Tribes

There are 36 tribal land designations in the five-state region. Many of these communities are served by rail and some communities in this region have logging operations. The RIA will reach out to these tribal agencies to increase awareness of rail and marine transportation grants and loans. We will also share outreach and education resources as appropriate for their resources needs such as grade crossing improvements, and the benefit of rail as an option to reduce issues related to weight restricted bridges.

The map in figure 5 illustrates the overlap in the Tribal Communities and low-density short line operations in need of rehabilitation. These agencies will receive specific attention as there are several log harvesting operations in this area which would benefit from improved rail access and economic reach.

3. Accelerator Proposal

The Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure Goal is to identify, support and improve the application process for federal transportation funding assistance and to develop cost effective projects in the five Great Lakes states. With expert project development advisors, we aim to improve supply chain network performance, expand market reach and enhance regional economic competitiveness by effectively leveraging transportation assets. Our focus is on rail, intermodal, ports and terminal development and future passenger rail and transit-oriented development projects.

A. Organization

The organization will assist rail, intermodal, marine and terminal projects by providing planning support and design assistance to improve transportation project funding success. We believe a large part of this process is helping project applicants and project beneficiaries understand what programs are available and how to demystify the process.

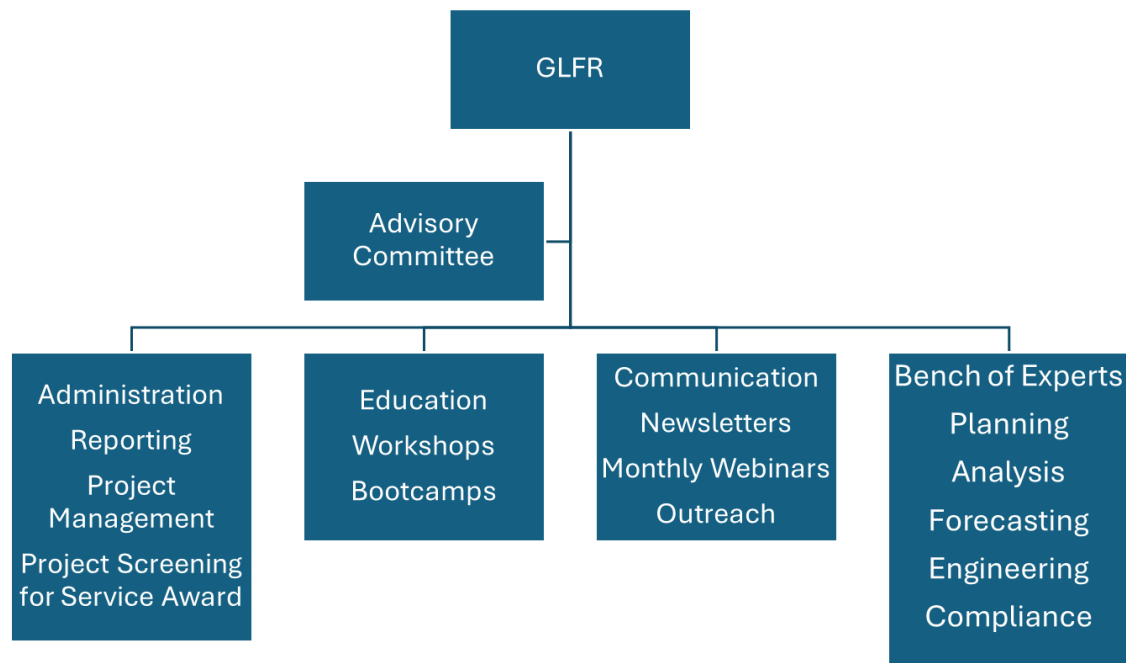


Figure 6 Organization Chart for Project Delivery

B. Partnerships

The RIA has received letters of support from three State DOT's which include Wisconsin, Illinois and Michigan. We will follow up with the two states which did not respond to ensure full five state participation.

Six Universities have responded to a request of interest, these organizations will provide content for workshops, bootcamps, newsletters, podcasts and webinars to increase the awareness of public programs to support transportation infrastructure development. We will hold monthly webinars and will send out monthly newsletters to ensure stakeholders have access to RIA supported materials.

There are nearly two dozen trade and transportation organizations, economic development and planning agencies in the five states who convene at least one meeting per year. We want to partner with these organizations to share information about what RIA services are available for their members, and we hope to gain a clear understanding of what challenges their members face in the project development journey. We hope to hold two workshops for key user groups.

Finally, we have identified a list of subject matter experts who will participate in an on-call contract based upon the project needs of RIA applicants for support. The applicants will be screened by the administrative team. Rubric will be created to assess project viability and likelihood of success. A list of next steps will be prepared and if the applicant agrees with the assessment, they have the choice to move forward with a subject matter expert.

C. Mobilization – 60 days

The GLFR organization will negotiate the contract with the Build America Bureau upon award. GLFR will meet with **NCWRPC** (Darryl Landeau) to discuss grant management protocols, documentation and how to prepare for project audits. Standardized documents will be developed to reduce rework and confusion.

GLFR will meet with the **Northwoods Rail Transit Commission** who will identify three to five individuals to participate in a steering committee to validate a screening process for projects, key deliverables and performance metrics.

GLFR will meet with the **Wisconsin Central Group/Lake States Shippers Association** and will develop a project prioritization rubric to ensure fairness and transparency. A stakeholder list will be developed, and a survey will be distributed to identify key needs for information, workshops, podcasts and research efforts.

A zoom meeting will be held with the group of **State DOT's** representing the five states in the RIA to identify goals, available resources and interest level in participation. We will share a stakeholder engagement plan for their comments and recommendations.

Universities will be invited to a web kick off meeting which will walk them through the outreach and education agenda. This will be hosted by Michigan Tech and their audio studio so we can all get familiar with the capabilities. We will host a brainstorming session based upon stakeholder feedback of wishes, wants, needs and desires.

Projects in the **preliminary pipeline** will be contacted individually, and an action plan will be developed for each project. This discussion will explore project history, funding

requests, project timeline, stakeholder needs and progress against a predevelopment checklist.

A calendar of monthly meetings will be assembled and keynote speakers for the first 12 months will be identified to review various grant programs, resources and innovations.

Upon completion of the mobilization phase a user guide will be developed and posted on the website which will be housed on the GLFR site unless otherwise specified. This will include how to apply, a schedule of outreach and education programs, an overview of what TIFIA, RRIF and PABs are and common questions. Three other RIAs will be interviewed who provide similar “Other/Corridor” programs to gain a better understanding of what is hard, easier than anticipated and what goals and performance measures they have developed. We believe standardization across RIA rail, terminal, intermodal and marine programs is desirable.

D. Specific Services

The Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure Accelerator will provide the following services:

1) Project Planning

This service will focus on project planning resources and how to match a project with a program to improve program awards. Project components, complexity and scope will be discussed to increase positive outcomes.

2) Project Analysis

Project analysis will pair a project with an expert to review key determinates in project development. Projects identified to be potentially successful may need additional analysis to complete their application, which the applicants are unfamiliar with. These reviews can mean the difference between winning and losing a project award. Each of these services will be outlined in the user guide for the RIA and suggested data sources will be identified to assist in the assessment.

- a. Feasibility
- b. Market analysis
- c. Project cost estimation
- d. Value for the money
- e. Public benefit calculation
- f. Environmental reviews

- g. Public outreach design
- 3) Revenue Forecasting

There are two RRIF projects in the proposed pipeline that will need to complete a revenue forecasting analysis. These projects will be offered to our on-call bench of experts to complete this work.

- 4) Preliminary engineering and design work

Three regional engineering firms have been identified to provide local engineering expertise in the development of project budgets and design drawings and project delivery.

- 5) Statutory and regulatory compliance analysis

Due to the diversity of projects and states we will assemble a state expert to match state projects.

E. Guidebooks, Tool Kits and Fact Sheets

The RIA plans on producing the following publications.

- A. An online User Guide to the Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure Accelerator will be developed. This guidebook will describe what an RIA is and isn't. How to develop a joint venture, project and program eligibility questions, what is predevelopment? When do I need a permit? and "Help my matching funds partner is no longer able to support the project!" No guide is complete without Frequently Asked Questions. The guide will discuss current service offerings and a summary of how to get the most out of your RIA. We will be open to being flexible to meet applicant needs.
- B. The second online guidebook will be designed to answer how to find a grant that is the right match for your capabilities, specific use cases and current funding situation. A list of popular grant programs will be developed which support rail, intermodal, marine and terminal projects.
- C. These two online documents may be used in part for webinar content, newsletter or workshop materials.
- D. A third document will be available online which will feature projects completed within the RIA framework. Each project which receives RIA services will be required to provide a two-page summary with photos of what was the problem they were trying to solve. It will include what barriers and challenges popped up along the way and how they were addressed. Outcomes will be documented to see how forecast and actual results can vary.

F. Communications Plan

Regional accelerators is a popular topic, and we have been taking note of best practices in communication and project applicant development. Project finance is complicated. The Great Lakes Infrastructure RIA aims to simplify project finance a bit at a time. To do this we plan to have monthly webinars and newsletters to help explain the basics of how to identify a good project from a project that is not ready. It will help applicants understand the risks and potential mitigation methods to streamline the process. A communication plan will highlight regular communication with different voices digging into a variety of common questions across different project types.

G. Unique Challenges for Rural Areas

The following unique challenges are often identified with rural projects.

1. Limited staff and existing staff may be assigned to multiple duties.
2. Lack of capital to invest in the long-term cost-effective solutions
3. Insufficient financial background and training to understand investment banking process.
4. Short horizons for immediate solutions
5. Working with old often outdated equipment or facilities, under capitalized
6. Need to respond quickly or risk customer loss.
7. Lack of support from economic development agencies
8. Economic development agencies and State DOTs often do not understand rail network protocols or carrier requirements for investment.
9. Local communities have the authority to create weight restrictions often in an effort to support tourism vs freight.
10. Concern that railroads are noisy and dirty and objectionable to modern development.

The RIA proposed to provide education and training in an effort to familiarize users with RIA products and banking processes.

H. Timeline

The timeline below shows a two-year RIA activity schedule.

The timeline loads a lot of mobilization into the first quarter to ensure the duration of the program runs smoothly. The program will peak during live applications for competitive discretionary grants, but RRIF and TIFIA consultation and PAB discussions will follow a more normal distribution of labor. We have three of these projects in the preliminary pipeline. This proposal has a very active communication plan for client acquisition targets.

The three stars in the Education and Communication box represent monthly communication activities.

Tasks	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
Project Management and Coordination								
Mobilization								
Stakeholder and Partners Coordination								
Education and Communication	***	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Pipeline Analysis								
Financial Planning								
Public Benefit Documentation								
Final Report and Evaluation								

I. Specific Milestones

- Within Q1 complete award contracting and sub-contracting for project.
- Begin Education outreach and newsletters and webinars to gain stakeholder familiarity within Q1.
- Q2 meets with top five TOD and RRIF clients to establish an action plan for funding within 20 months. This would include the Watco Lines in Wisconsin, The Milwaukee Clearance project for intermodal containers and an intermodal terminal, The DOT project in SE Wisconsin, the PAB project for Rochelle, IL and the Great Lakes Basin Rail Permitting Project starting in IN.
- Q4 Have three projects engaged with subject matter experts to move towards an application.
- Q6 Transition the RIA to a standalone sustainable business model.
- Q8 Complete an assessment of public benefits and close out the project.

J. Performance Targets

- Create an attendance list from webinars and outreach events and contact each attendee to determine their interest in the program. Aim to get 25% of the attendees to submit a project for RIA review.
- Develop a sustainability plan by Q6 to identify the value of the services provided for RIA stakeholders. Identify sponsors, subscription fees for on demand content and webinars. Sell guild books on digital marketplaces.

- Have one PAB, RRIF and TIFIA project in the process to close within 12 months of Q8.
- Make contact with 4 rural tribal or ROUTES related projects by Q2 likely on the Watco line in Northern Wisconsin, Michigan or Minnesota.

4. Budget

The Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure Accelerator is requesting \$1.5 million to support the proposed RIA. No non-federal matching funds are included in this proposal. There are no employees, all human resources will work as independent contractors and will expense travel, or other out-of-pocket costs as identified in the contract. The partner agencies will support the Project Manager. The On-call subject matter experts will support predevelopment project planning, engineering, cost estimation, permitting, research and studies, market analysis, feasibility studies, public benefit assessments, environmental reviews, revenue studies and statutory/regulatory compliance.

Activities	Federal Request 2-year Award	Percent of Project
Administration		
Project Manager	\$ 240,000.00	
NCWRPC	\$ 20,000.00	
NWRTC	\$ 20,000.00	
WCGROUP	\$ 20,000.00	
Administration Subtotal	\$ 300,000.00	20%
Education and Outreach		
Webinars - Quantity 8	\$ 100,000.00	
Outreach - indefinite	\$ 100,000.00	
Newsletters - Quantity 24	\$ 35,000.00	
Website/Communication/podcast	\$ 10,000.00	
Education and Outreach Subtotal	\$ 245,000.00	16%
Subject Matter Experts on-Call	\$ 955,000.00	64%
Total Budget	\$ 1,500,000.00	100%

5. Selection Criteria

A. Experience

Libby Ogard, MBA, IAMPE – Executive Director, RIA

Ms. Ogard will serve as the Executive Director of the Regional Infrastructure Accelerator (RIA), reporting directly to GSGP. With extensive experience in marketing, transportation, and operations for Class I railroads, she has secured more than \$92 million in federal and state grant funding for freight economic development projects.

Libby's career highlights include launching a container division at Schneider National, where she managed a 12-person customer service team, established contracts with container owners and service providers, developed a sales incentive program, and generated over \$1 million in sales in the division's first year. The division remains operational today, 40 years after its inception.

Recently, she completed a ferry decarbonization project for GSGP and contributed to research projects for the Illinois Soybean Association, the largest soybean producer in North America and a key user of the Great Lakes transportation network. Additionally, Libby served for six years on the Department of Commerce Supply Chain Competitiveness Council, providing expertise on public finance, permitting, and logistics issues.

Barb Ward Wilson, MBA – Pipeline Development Advisor

Barb Wilson is an independent business advisor specializing in mergers and acquisitions, holding an MBA from Babson College. She will oversee pipeline development and lead the project readiness review process before projects transition to technical assistance.

Barb brings extensive financial and operational expertise, having served as President of Wells Fargo Rail at Wells Fargo Bank and as President and CEO of RailUSA LLC. At RailUSA, she organized a team that successfully secured a Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan, demonstrating her capacity to manage complex infrastructure financing projects.

Elaine Nessel – Outreach and Public Engagement Advisor

Elaine Nessel will guide outreach, public engagement, and trade association communications. She will play a critical role in developing public messaging strategies and fostering stakeholder collaboration to support RIA initiatives.

Representations

Innovative Financing Expertise: The leadership team collectively brings extensive experience in assessing and promoting innovative financing methods for local projects, including leveraging federal programs such as TIFIA and RRIF. Together, they have secured over \$100 million in funding from public innovative financing programs. This expertise spans both passenger and freight programs, positioning the RIA team to deliver impactful results.

Technical Assistance on Financing Best Practices: Libby Ogard has a proven track record as a grant writer across federal and state programs in the Upper Midwest. Her work has advanced project development and funding for agriculture exports, containerization, decarbonization, and multimodal marine and rail infrastructure. She has led webinars for GSGP members, sharing insights on leveraging publicly available freight funding opportunities. Notably, she spearheaded a Transportation Research Board (TRB) National Cooperative Research project that produced a directory of state and federal passenger and freight grant and loan programs.

Transparency in Infrastructure Financing: The team has demonstrated expertise in promoting transparency in infrastructure project analysis and financing. The Coalition of America's Gateways and Trade Corridors has played a key role in assessing federal programs and providing policy feedback to the U.S. DOT. Barb Wilson has directly contributed to improvements in the RRIF loan process, informed by her experience with RailUSA LLC's successful participation in the program.

Predevelopment Capital Deployment: Libby Ogard's work on a Freight Rail Economic Development Program for Minnesota DOT helped develop state legislation that increased funding for the Minnesota Rail Service Improvement Program. This effort led to six successful projects that transformed agricultural exports, rail-to-river infrastructure, and critical rail enhancements, particularly in response to the CPKC merger.

Project Bundling Expertise: Libby has successfully bundled smaller-scale projects to attract investment. She secured three MARAD PIDP grants, including two within the GSGP region. Highlights include a \$20 million project at the Port of Duluth, incorporating marine dock improvements, container capabilities, and a warehouse for container freight operations, and a \$36 million project at the Port of Milwaukee, which layered public and private funding to support an agricultural export facility.

Reducing Transaction Costs: The Bo DeLong agricultural export project, led by Libby, reduced transportation costs for Upper Midwest producers while expanding market reach. By introducing unit train operations and on-dock transloading, the project significantly enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness for agricultural exports.

Accelerating TIFIA-Eligible Projects: The team has substantial experience accelerating projects through innovative financing strategies such as TIFIA and RRIF credit programs, project bundling, private activity bonds (PABs), and leveraging private capital. Barbara Ward Wilson notably developed a successful RRIF credit program for RailUSA LLC.

Developing Project Financial Plans: Barb Wilson has extensive experience in crafting project financial plans, including capital structures and identifying funding sources. Her tenure at Wells Fargo and RailUSA demonstrates a strong track record in achieving financial closures for complex infrastructure projects.

Engagement with Private Sector and Disadvantaged Communities: Libby Ogard has over 20 years of experience as an independent consultant, contributing to eight state rail plans and ten freight plans for over 25 states. She has supported rural and low-resourced communities, including persistent poverty areas in Northeast Arkansas, through successful port development, trade programs, Marine Highway projects, and PIDP initiatives that have driven economic revitalization.

A. Context of Transportation Infrastructure Investments

The Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure RIA has identified four critical investment areas aligned with the five state's priorities:

Reconnecting Marine and Rail Assets: Strengthening the connection between marine and rail systems will extend the economic advantages of Great Lakes transportation to inland markets. Addressing stranded rail assets and resolving legacy rail network inefficiencies are also essential for meeting the growing demand for passenger rail in the Midwest.

Carbon fuel reduction: By supporting biofuel initiatives, electrification, and other low-emission technologies, the RIA aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while fostering sustainable economic growth.

Agricultural Exports: Agricultural exports are vital to the regional economy and align with Great Lakes' growth objectives. Geopolitical shifts and declining water levels have

increased transportation costs, making the development of efficient Great Lakes transportation networks crucial for supporting this dynamic industry.

Containerization on the Great Lakes: The pandemic highlighted the need for containerized shipping within the Great Lakes, as coastal ports faced capacity and operational constraints. Developing containerization infrastructure will enhance trade fluidity and support North American supply chains.

The Great Lakes Regional Infrastructure RIA is prepared to address additional projects identified through public-private partnerships. While an initial list of potential projects has been identified, the RIA rigorous screening of proposed projects still needs to be completed to determine final suitability for inclusion in the RIA's pipeline.

B. Partnerships

The Letters of Support in the attachment to the application provide letters from three states, and six universities who have expressed interest in the project. We have received projects from the five state areas which are interested in the process. The Wisconsin Rail organizations have done nearly 20 years of work since the sale of Wisconsin Central in an effort to reconnect stranded assets to realize a more efficient and productive supply chain.

C. Business Model

The RIA will not have a public office. Instead, staff will work from home offices and will provide computers, printers and communication equipment such as phones and internet hot spots as part of their overhead rate. A 1099 independent contractor arrangement will be made with:

- RIA executive Director
- NCRPC advisory
- NWRTC Oversight
- WCGROUP/LSSA Stakeholder Liaison
- Universities contracted for outreach, communication, workshops, boot camps etc.
- Subject matter experts who are assigned to meet the needs of the RIA Applicants for technical assistance

There will be no employees, each RIA associate will be given a 24-month independent

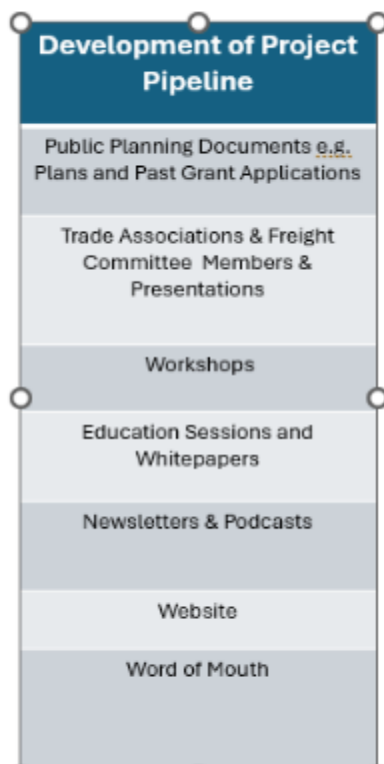
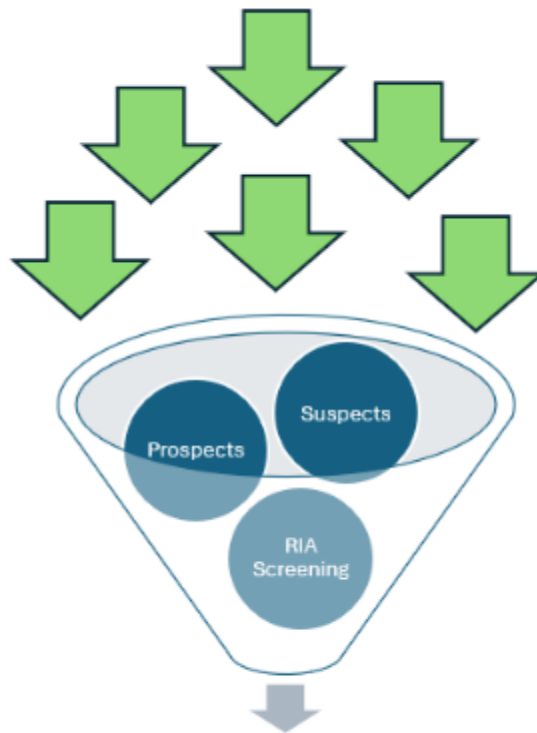


Figure 7 Business Model for Identification of RIA Clients



contractor agreement which will include a travel budget depending on the scope of work.

Guild books, tool kits, educational materials will all be provided electronically and via an internet delivery system. Podcasts and webinars will be leveraged to reduce costs. Workshops will be held either

prior or following a trade organization's meeting to cut down on venue costs.

Podcasts, webinars and newsletters will be distributed at no cost, but meeting registration will be required. There will be no fee for submitting an RIA application for technical assistance review. Once selected for moving forward to being an on-call consultant/subject matter expert. The RIA applicant will be responsible for 10% of the On-Call Project support contractor's fee. The applicant will sign an agreement for these services before the consultant is engaged. This funding will flow back to RIA technical assistance support developmental resources.

- No other federal or state grants will be used to support the center.
- The RIA will explore foundation support for technical assistance for public agencies.
- The RIA will seek sponsorship for meetings and events.

D. Pipeline of Projects

The project pipeline aims to move forward at least one TIFIA, one RRIF and one PAB program within the first twelve months of the RIA program, provided that the audience of stakeholders remains interested and that funding programs remain intact. Each project selected must demonstrate innovative finance, freight or passenger rail development and a project within the five states which improve freight connectivity in a rail, marine or terminal context.

Due to the rural nature of so many of the projects we anticipate supporting state and federal competitive grant applications in addition to Build America Loan Programs.

The Pipeline of projects below are representative of discussions about rural project needs. There is an interest in tug and harbor electrification to replace aged tugs over 60 years old. This class of harbor craft is need to pilot international container ships on the Great Lakes and to position large container vessels at the terminal. These investments would be on the shoreside of the supply chain and would support containerization.

Project Name and Description	Project Sponsor	Location	Cost Estimate	Program
	Estimated Timeline			
Marine Ferry and Tug Electrification Multiple Great Lakes Locations	Various State DOTs / Two years	WI, MI, IL, OH - permits, shore side electrification	\$24 Million	TIFIA
Grain silo removal and new roof for cross dock, pavement and improvements to terminal	Improve outdated grain and cross dock operation/ 1 year	IL - Program education	\$10 Million	RRIF
Michigan Biofuels Industry Support for BIOFUEL Distribution and Transload Facilities	Port of Monroe or Port of Detroit, Michigan DOT / 1 year	MI - Program education and permitting	\$15 Million	RRIF
Briess Malt Manitowoc Rail Expansion and Dock Improvement	Wisconsin DOT or Port of Manitowoc Joint	WI - Program education and dock improvements	\$30 Million	RRIF

	Venture 18 months			
Rochelle Logistics Park Logistics Park and Intermodal Improvements for 1200 Acres to support 7 logistics projects and 2 intermodal trains per week. Three rail crossing eliminations and a PAB for an import Auto Distribution Facility	City of Rochelle/ 6 months	IL - Land purchase, rail loop track installation, Off ramp from I-39, 3 grade crossing closures	\$65 Million	RRIF and or PAB
Shawnee town Fertilizer 20 miles Rail Connection to Connect to Class 1 Rail distribution in Tri State Area	Port of Shawnee town / 8 months	IL - permitting and program education	\$46 Million	RRIF
Jeff Foster Rail and Container Yard to Expand Container Operations in Duluth Superior Market	Port of Superior, WI / 6 months	WI - Program education and dock wall/building improvements	\$25 Million	RRIF
Great Lakes Basin Railroad to complete the Permitting to develop a Chicago Freight Bypass	Short Line Railroad Application/ 4 months	IN, IL, WI - Permitting and revenue forecasting	\$35 Million	TIFIA and RRIF
ADW Logistics Pleasant Prairie Brownfield Rail Development Site	Local public agency /6 months	WI - Program education and permits, pre dev costs	\$2 Million	CRISI Grant

for Covered Rail Transfer Site				
ADW Logistics Gary, IN rail siding and track improvements for transloading	Local Public Agency or Short Line/ 6 months	IN – Predev work, permitting	\$2 Million	CRISI Grant
ADW Logistics Dearborn, MI Consumer Products Transload	Short Line or State Rail Program	MI – Predev work, permitting.	\$2 Million	CRISI Grant
ADW Logistics Lakeville, MN Consumer food transload	Short line or State Rail Program	MN – Predev Work, Permitting	\$2 Million	CRISI or State Grant
ADW Logistics Galesburg IL PPP with Knox County for a Rail Access Center	Local public agency /6 months	IL - permits and capital project, predev cost	\$2 Million	CRISI Grant
Frazer Shipyard Improve Rail Connectivity for Steel and Engine components	Port of Superior, WI/ 6 months	WI - permits and capital analysis, predev cost establishment of a rail yard	\$45 Million	RRIF
Port of Chicago St Mary Cement Improvement, Grain Silo Rail Access, IIPD Main Rail Terminal, Transit sheds	Illinois International Port District / 8 months	IL - Permits and capital project	\$69.7 Million	RRIF
MKE Transit Oriented Dev	Port of Milwaukee / 3 months	Wi - permits, revenue forecasting, project costs	\$410 Million	TOD

Watco North Wood Line	Watco Short Line Railroad/ 24 months	WI – 650-mile market analysis, permits, capital investment, predevelopment planning	\$65 Million	RRIF
Ports of Indiana Container Term Phase 2 Development of Container Yard in Burns Harbor IN	Port of Indiana / 6 months	IN - predev costs, public benefit analysis	\$20 Million	RRIF or grant program
Port of Monroe Support for Containerization Expansion	Port of Monroe / 12 months	MI - predevelopment cost and permits	\$10 Million	RRIF or PIDP
Double Stack UP Milwaukee to support Passenger and Freight Rail Clearance Impediments	Port of Milwaukee or Wisconsin DOT/ 12 months	WI - cost assessment, public benefit analysis, permits	\$55 Million	RRIF
All Projects	Total	5 States	\$934.7 Million	All

E. Project Readiness

The RIA has identified a pipeline of projects across multiple states and has project diversity for developers who may seek rail or intermodal or passenger or marine projects. The letters of support for five projects indicate near term project readiness to move forward with the RRIF and TIFIA loan process. Three of these projects have completed substantial predevelopment work. They include Rochelle, IL PAB rail project, The Great Lakes Basin Railroad permitting project and The SE Wisconsin Transit Orient Development project.

F. Self-Sustainability

The budget shows a two-year award. A proforma for year three is shown below. The fee for on call consultant services increases from 10 to 20%, Webinar sponsorships will be sold to generate \$5,000 per month, for a total of 12 webinars. Memberships will be sold at \$300

each for a 12-month period. A foundation grant will be applied for to offset the cost of on-call experts for public projects. The RIA will assume for year three a \$1,296,000 income.

Costs for admin, outreach and consultation are assumed at \$872,500 and a year three profit of \$872,500 could be captured. These costs are estimate.

SELF SUSTAINABILITY YEAR 3	RIA GENERATED
20% of \$955,000	\$ 191,000.00
Webinar Sponsorships \$5000 each 12	\$ 60,000.00
150 memberships at \$300 each	\$ 45,000.00
Foundation Funding for Public Projects	\$ 1,000,000.00
Year Three Income	\$ 1,296,000.00
Year Three Admin and Education Costs	\$ 872,500.00
Year Three Profit	\$ 423,500.00

- Value Capture will be explored in conjunction with the Transit Oriented Development Project.
- Sponsorships are noted for educational and outreach events identified above.
- Private Development models are of interest with short line and industrial development opportunities but will require more exploration to see how they fit in a rural area.
- Concession models are more suitable for urban development but will be explored.
- Fares or use fees can be explored and maybe suitable for per car or per container shipments.

G. Risks

- Risks include a tepid economy or recession, war or trade policies which create uncertainty. This would result in grant and loan seekers stepping back from a project development effort due to concern about change or lower business volumes.
- The Build America Program may be reduced or eliminated resulting in a lack of confidence in the program.
- On-call consultants providing RIA supported services may be too high priced for value conscious project developers.
- The price of RIA technical assistance contractors may not be competitive with the local market.
- Changes in the interest rates will make the Build America Program non-competitive.

