

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

**BLPOA Community Center
6996 South SR 10
Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana**

October 23, 2024

MEMBERS

**Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Joan Hardesty
Kathleen Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Rich Vallicelli**

GUEST

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum

Call to Order by President

On October 23, 2024, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake at 5:31 pm, CDT (6:31 pm, EDT).

Review and Approval of Minutes of September 19, 2024

Rich Vallicelli moved to approve without amendment the minutes of September 19, 2024. Paul Byer seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds

Kathy Lucas distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as shown below:



**Treasurer's Report
October 23, 2024**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance on September 19, 2024 (prior meeting) \$105,666.95

INCOME

10/02/24	Ace Hardware North Judson "Round Up" Program	110.00
10/17/24	Arlene Noble dues	25.00
10/21/24	T.I. Jones dues (two years)	<u>50.00</u>

Total Income \$185.00

EXPENSES

09/18/24	Check #1175 to Precept Partners (website security and content update)	90.00
09/25/24	Check #1176 to Paul Byer (chainsaw for Michael McGregor to remove limbs)	179.99
10/02/24	Check #1177 to Jim Chessor (mowing rest park 9/18 (#6) and 10/1 (#7))	<u>200.00</u>

Total Expenses (\$469.99)

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 10/23/24 \$105,381.96

(Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer)

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

**TOTAL AMOUNTS
PER CATEGORY**

Benches

Blais-Vlaming and McMillin Bench	\$350 each; awaiting placement	\$700.00	
			\$700.00

Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	960.64	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	2,948.32	
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			\$4,571.46

Northwest Extension

PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00	
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00	
Rails to Trails Conservancy	Trail Extension	5,974.72	
			\$41,574.72

DNR Reimbursements for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension

05/15/24 (Payment #1)	17,589.06		
07/19/24 (Payment #2)	6,077.48		
			\$23,666.54

Maintenance

Mower Fund	Verhagen mowing donation (NICF)	400.00 (Reduced by \$200 for 2 mowings)*
Hardesty Memorial Fund	Trail maintenance	594.00
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	1,788.61 (Reduced by 179.99)**
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations	Maintenance or Most Needed	2,699.11
Doral Solar Contribution	Bridge/Trailside Clearing	7,269.48

\$12,751.20

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$82,883.93

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST

TOTAL IN BANK

\$105,381.96

— RESTRICTED FUNDS

82,883.93

= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

\$22,498.03

*Mowing rest park by Jim Chessor (09/18 and 10/01)

**Chainsaw for M. McGregor to remove fallen trees and limbs

Kathy expressed appreciation to the North Judson Ace Hardware for the contribution through its “Round Up” program. The donation is the second from this program. She thanked Arlene Noble and T.I. Jones for their continued support through membership dues.

Kathy said that the Precept Partners billing was for two purposes. It was a pass-through to continue website security. Also, the slideshow on our homepage was updated with fresh materials, including our 5K Run/3K Walk on Memorial Day Weekend and native plants photographed in the trail corridor for the first time this spring.

Kathy reported that longtime member Mike McGregor has expressed enthusiasm for the small chainsaw purchased by Paul, using PTC funding, that will allow Mike to help keep the trail function following windfalls. He is a regular trail rider and often the first person to observe trees or bushes covering the trail following a storm.

Kathy praised the mowing efforts of Jim Chessor. With an initiative generously funded by Kirt Verhagen, Jim has mowed not only the central areas of the rest park but also the challenging slopes along the railroad and along State Road 10.

Deb Mix moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Paul seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Consideration of 2025 Mint Festival Collaboration

Members brainstormed concepts that could allow the PTC to collaborate with those managing the 2025 Mint Festival in North Judson. Concepts included a bike decoration contest or a 5K Run/Walk. The members determined ultimately to pursue Deb’s idea of operating a pedal-powered smoothie machine accompanied by a PTC information table. Visitors would be learn about our organization’s aspirations—with emphasis upon the northwest trail extension through North Judson. This subject will be revisited during the December 4 meeting.

Consider Application to Starke County CVC to Help Fund a 2025 5K Run/3K Walk on the Great American Rail-Trail

On September 21, Kathy Norem, President of the Starke County Convention and Visitors Association, invited the PTC to seek a grant for an event that supports local tourism. The CVC previously provided a grant that helped us underwrite the 5K Run/3K Walk held at Starke County Road 700 East on May 25—Saturday of Memorial Day weekend.

The due date for a grant application was set for November 3. Steve said Kathy and he prepared a rough draft application and sought input from the PTC Board Members and Officers—as well as from Brian and Anita who spearheaded the May 25 event. With good comments from Linda, Kirt, Russ, Diane, Peg and Brian, we prepared the modified draft that was circulated with the email notice of tonight's Membership Meeting. The proposed application would repeat the event at the same SCR 700 East location and would again be penciled in for the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend. But Steve said he thought we could still be flexible on the date if a grant is received. Thought was given to relocating the event to North Judson, but his understanding was there was a consensus we would hold up on that until 2026 with the hope the North Judson trail extension would then be completed.

Joan Hardesty expressed concerns that the event site might not accommodate a large turnout. Steve responded that was a possibility but he believed with better planning the gravel parking lot could hold more vehicles than it held during the inaugural event. Brian said he believed parking would be more effective with persons directing patrons. Rich agreed a larger turnout was a possibility, but those were high-class worries, and better use could be made of the space along the trail.

Several members expressed the perspective that a location at or near North Judson might afford a larger turnout but not necessarily more out-of-county visitors. Russ said he believed some members of the CVC had been encouraged by the high percentage of participants this year coming from outside Starke County.

Deb moved to submit the grant application as presented without amendments. Brian seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Northwest Trail Extension Report and Considerations of Approvals in ITP-23-06 for:

(A) "Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail" Logo

Circulated with last week's email notice was the image for a proposed Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail logo formulated by Bob Aloï and his firm. Paper copies of the image were also circulated at the meeting. A logo is needed for signage and items such as T-shirts.

The proposed logo was commented upon favorably by members during the August 22 meeting and forwarded to the BIC Committee for review. By email, 13 BIC Committee members expressed opinions ranging from satisfaction to enthusiasm for its adoption. No negative opinions were expressed.

The logo was presented for discussion and possible approval as an official logo of the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail.

Russ asked if the coloration on the copies of the distributed logo would be part of what would be adopted. Steve responded that several comments expressed support for the coloration so inclusion of the coloration was his understanding.

Deb moved to approve the logo as the official logo of the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail. Anita McMillin seconded the motion, and the motion passed.



(B) Final Construction Plans to be Prepared for DNR Review

Steve said he and Kathy were invited by DNR's Division of State Parks Grant Coordinator, Erica Gummere, to join her team onsite on October 1 for a trail walk-through. The grants team was previously scheduled to, and did meet with, the Town of North Judson earlier on October 1 regarding improvements to its parks. Steve said DNR's invitation regarding our ITP-23-06 grant was made just a few days in advance, and other PTC members were unable to get free and participate.



During the walk-through DNR re-emphasized its perspective that the number of gates should be reduced from what was proposed on Territorial Engineering's 95% completed design plans. Kathy and I told DNR's grants team that we had discussed the possible reduction with Bob and with the Town. We said our understanding was the Town wanted gates only at the trail crossing of English Lake Road—both to emphasize the trail into town was a not a roadway and for safety because English Lake Road has frequent high-speed traffic. DNR expressed satisfaction with this approach and with the trail route generally. Kathy and I later spoke with North Judson Clerk-Treasurer, Andrew Rowe, and Town Manager, Joe Leszek, who confirmed our understanding of their view regarding gate placement.

Bob Alois had planned on joining the October 23 meeting to present the proposed final construction plans to the membership. But during the meeting he texted Rhonda that he was delayed unexpectedly at a meeting in St. Joseph County. Rhonda suggested that rather than delay action until the next Membership meeting, the Board of Directors should take needed actions regarding review of the plans. Paul moved to authorize the Board to take these actions. Joan Hardesty seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

(A) Asphalt Repairs

As earlier promised, Kathy contacted Town & Country Construction, Inc. to seek a quote or quotes for repairs to crumbling trail asphalt at two locations adjacent to wetlands: (1) west of Bogus Run bridge along what is sometimes referred to as Gumz Pond; and, (2) roughly halfway between Starke County Road 100 West and Range Road. Kathy said representatives of Town & Country came promptly out to view the two sites and provided a quote for the cost of doing both sites. The quoted amount would nearly exhaust the PTC's available cash reserves so she asked for separate quotes for the two sites. Again, Town & Country was responsive. During the meeting she distributed a Town & Country contract proposal that included separate quotes for the two sites. She said there were elements of the contract that were inconsistent with our site conditions but these could be resolved through negotiations. In response to a question, Kathy said the proposal would be for work in 2025.

Rich said that maintaining the trail in a manner that affords reasonable safety for users should be a priority. Asphalt failure that results in grooves parallel to a trail's orientation pose greater risks, particularly to bicyclists, than those that are perpendicular. He said he supported the concept of contracting for the type of repair work identified in the Town & Country quote.

Several members noted that the PTC is not the owner of the trail or the land on which the trail is located. As a not-for-profit without the ability to tax, PTC resources are limited. For other public trails, counties, municipalities, or other governmental entities are often the primary sources for maintenance funding. Even so, the PTC should advance projects for maintenance and user safety to the extent our resources allow.

Paul said if the PTC contracts for a demonstration project at one of the sites identified in the Town & Country quotes, we would be showing our commitment to public safety. Such a demonstration project may encourage other donors to come forward.

Several members urged that quotes be sought from additional contractors before going forward with a project. With winter's approach, a 2024 project cannot be undertaken. Names of potential contractors were identified. Steve said that he hoped members would contact contractors to obtain bids for a result similar to what Kathy outlined. Kathy said she would explore the availability of possible partners to assist with funding. There was an apparent consensus that the repair of crumbling asphalt should be a priority.

(B) Storage Facility

There was a follow-up discussion of the need to obtain a storage facility to house the PTC's equipment. A member suggested the dimensions of a building might properly be 14 feet by 20 feet. The remains of the former creamery on the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum property near Main Street was suggested as a possible temporary location. Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, said he would seek perspectives of the HVRM's Board of Directors. More discussion of this topic is anticipated at the December 4 PTC meeting.

(C) Main Street to Bogus Run Bridge

Applying the donation made by Kirt Verhagen, Jim Chessor completed another mowing of the rest park subsequent to those referenced in the Treasurer's Report. Jim also mows between the rest park and Main Street as a courtesy. Not all of the funding in Kirt's donation has been expended, and members discussed whether another would be needed this year. Kirt will be asked his preference.

Randy Glass wrote that this fall he yet intends to trim brush along the trail from the rest park and Bogus Run bridge. He added that it has been too hot to do that kind of work. This generous offer includes an area being considered for asphalt repairs and would help to facilitate that project.

Report of September 28 Workday

Members agreed during the September 19 meeting that the focus of the PTC's scheduled workday would be vegetation control. Primary efforts would be between Starke County Road 400 East and the trailhead on the west side of US Highway 35.

Russ identified weed control at Starke County Road 600 East as an additional need. Secondary efforts would be for weed control in this area.

Turnout for the workday was excellent. Participants were John Bulger, MD; Diane Blais, Rick Vlaming, Frank Staulbaum, Peggy Stalbrink, Charlotte Liss, Larry Wickert, Russ, Paul, Joan, Anita, Rhonda, Kathy and Steve.

Peggy purchased a new leaf blower for the PTC which Paul assembled at the worksite. This acquisition will benefit the PTC significantly, and at the meeting members expressed their appreciation. She also brought wonderful homemade cookies and lemonade.

Frank drove from Hebron, Indiana. He has expertise and experience in the management of exotic species. He is most closely associated with the Veterans Memorial Trail in Porter County, a segment of the Great American Rail-Trail. Frank was previously of great assistance on a workday and has attended meetings when he provided helpful insights.

Char brought out her tractor and began mowing even before the official start of the workday. She ultimately mowed from US 35 to Starke County Road 700 South and back. This effort extended for about 4 1/2 miles—well exceeding our workday expectations.

In addition to weed control at SCR 600 E, Rick blew leaves off the asphalt all the way to US 35. Again, the scope of this effort exceeded our expectations.

These efforts and the efforts of the other participants demonstrate the dedication of our organization and friends.

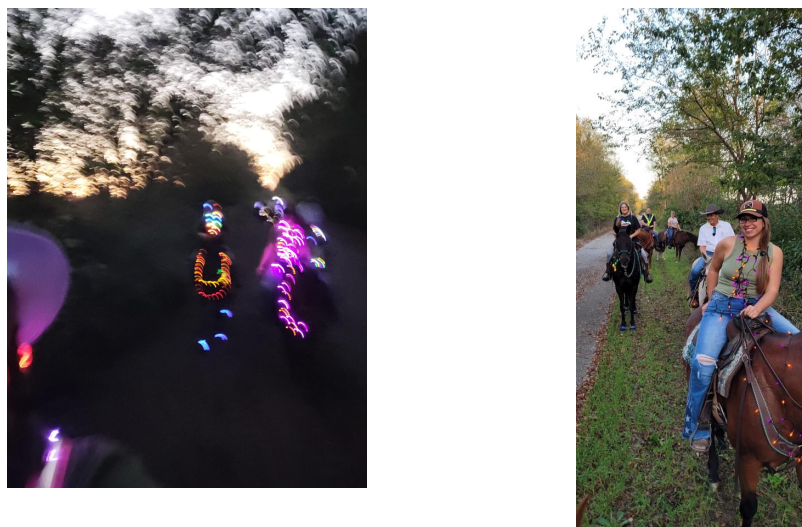


From left to right: Char and tractor early in the morning; John moving leaves near SCR 700 S; Frank from inside the jungle eradicating asiatic bittersweet; and Rick after a clean sweep near SCR 600 E.

Images by K. Lucas

Report of Erie Trail Glow Ride on October 5

Charlotte led the second annual Erie Trail Glow Ride on October 5. She reported that the weather was good, and it was a beautiful event. Images below are from Char's Facebook post.



Trail Counters Discussion

Joan said she again attempted to revive the trail counter that was damaged by human tampering. She inserted fresh batteries. The data logger directed a change of batteries. Joan put in different batteries, but the logger still directed a change of batteries. Efforts at revival have all failed so the PTC now has only a single functioning counter instead of two.

The discussion then turned to the cost for replacing the counter. Members' recollections varied from about \$1,200 to about \$1,500 per counter.* Rich suggested the price likely has increased since.

Kathy said she recently attempted to identify a price online, and preferably from a vendor in the United States. Vendors she identified wanted consultations before giving a quote and were all outside the US. As examples, she noted Australian and Canadian firms.

Joan expressed interest in exploring purchase from the same Canadian firm as was used in 2022. In prior meetings she had spoken favorably about its technical support. Also, equipment should be compatible with what we have and the company is "tried and true". Members gratefully accepted her offer to take the lead on identifying purchase options.

Discussion then turned to whether the functional counter should be relocated. Rich said the PTC has obtained good data from the counters on both sides of US 35. He suggested we might learn more with another location.

Linda said the equipment could be made more secure than was the situation with the tampered and ruined counter. Members suggested several possible sites but settled on one closer to North Judson. Members will review this subject at the next meeting.

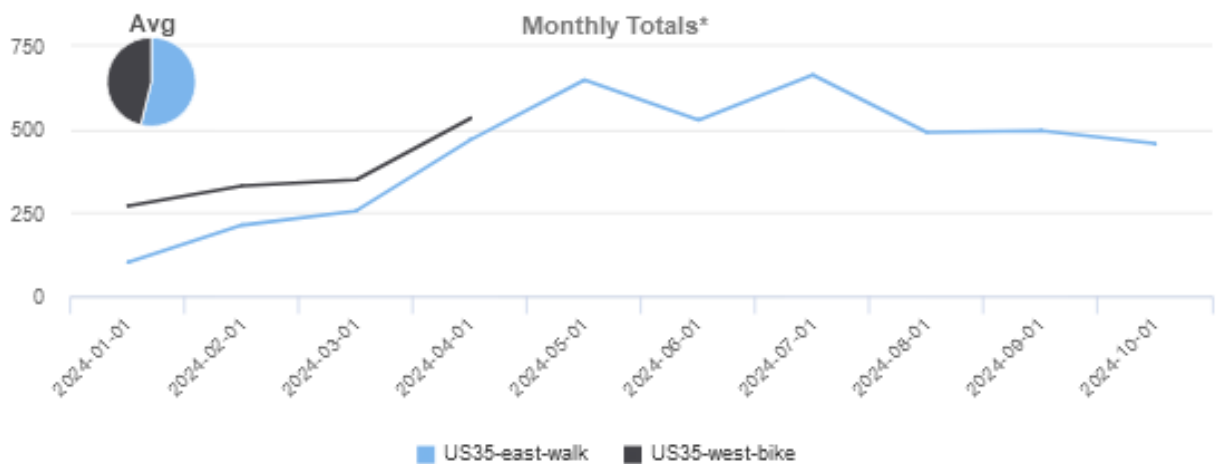
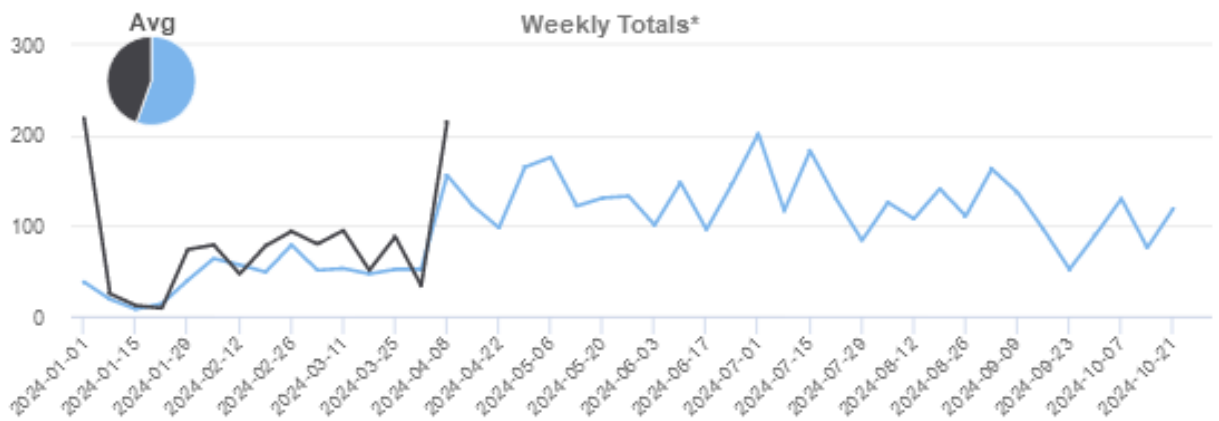
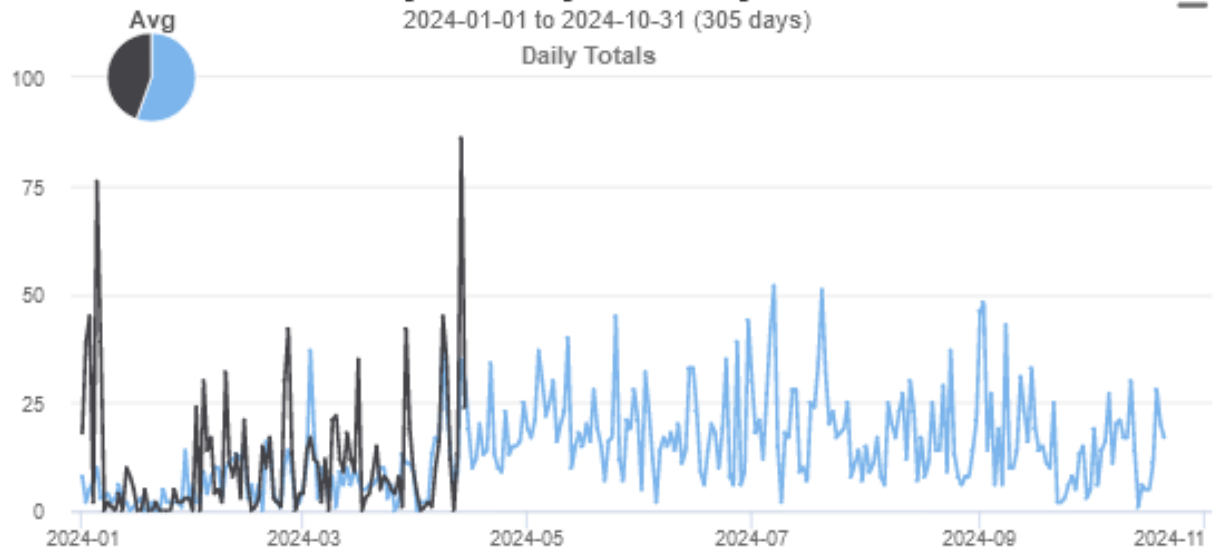
Joan distributed a printout showing counter data through October. Her printout is set forth on the next page. If you compare average daily usages, keep in mind that, due to the tampering with the counter on the west side of US 35, the data for 2024 excludes high-usage months of May through September.

***Editor's note: Minutes from the Membership Meeting of May 26, 2022, page 2, state:**

".... Kathy said she ordered two counters from Canadian firm TRAFx Research Ltd. following a quote, including shipping and handling, of \$1,960. TRAFx very recently informed her the counters have been shipped. The Order Confirmation for the quote described the system package as including 2 TRAFx Infrared Trail Counters, 1 TRAFx Dock, 1 TRAFx DataNet Plan, 2 cables, 1 TRAFx User Manual, 1 TRAFx Disc, and premium level technical support for five years.

Daily/Weekly/Monthly totals

2024-01-01 to 2024-10-31 (305 days)

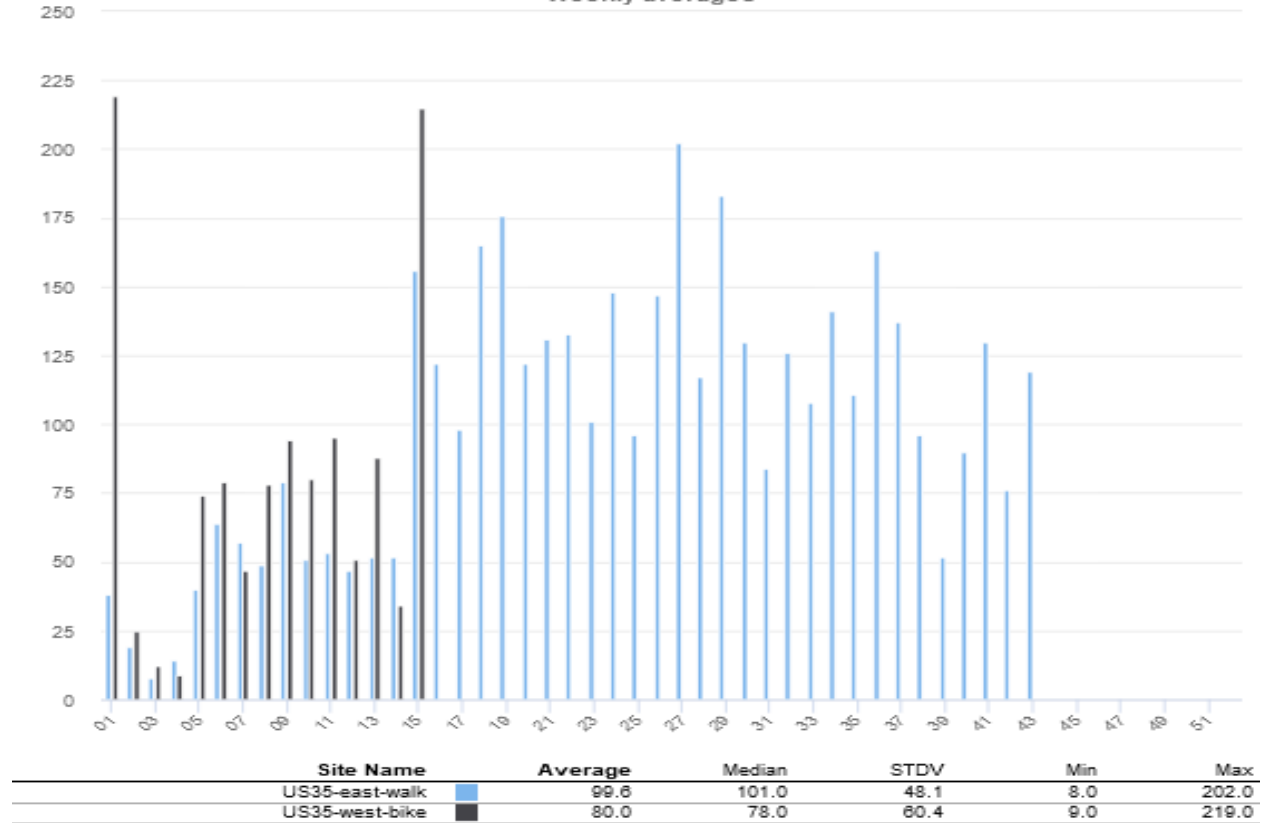


Weeks of the year

2024-01-01 to 2024-10-23



Weekly averages



Master Summary

Download as [Excel](#) [CSV](#)

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADT†	ADT†x365	Days with data
2022	US35-east-walk									564*	490	372	217*	14,034	5,123	87
2023	US35-east-walk		235*	218	555	692	688	734	593	527	315	282	271	15,624	5,703	319
2024	US35-east-walk	102	213	256	469	649	529	664	492	497	458*			14,173	5,187	295

ADT† = Average Daily Traffic

* = based upon that month's ADT [Learn more](#) Indicates months with less than 6 days of data.

Master Summary

Download as [Excel](#) [CSV](#)

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADT†	ADT†x365	Days with data
2022	US35-west-bike									844*	596	339	116*	16,067	5,865	89
2023	US35-west-bike		103*	234	522*	1,039*	995	941	586	648*	438*	628*	465*	20,525	7,492	263
2024	US35-west-bike	271	331	349	534*									11,429	4,183	105

ADT† = Average Daily Traffic

* = based upon that month's ADT [Learn more](#) Indicates months with less than 6 days of data.

Review Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, reported on recent Railroad Museum activities. He said operations are proceeding at a high level. The two mid-day trains are usually sold out. "There were more than 900 riders last weekend."

Bob said Pumpkin Trains are typically sold out and will come to conclusion at the end of the month. Santa Trains will begin on November 30 and are scheduled for four dates that conclude on December 21. He added that with the HVRM's great success its volunteers have become a bit "stressed out and burned out."

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was set for Wednesday, December 4, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m., CDT (7:40 p.m., EDT).