Project Description

April 2016

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Acronyms

DEIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
IHB	Indiana Harbor Belt
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NICTD	Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District
NIRPC	Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission
SSL	South Shore Line

1. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD) are conducting the environmental review process for the West Lake Corridor Project (Project) in Lake County, Indiana and Cook County, Illinois in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other regulatory requirements. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is being prepared as part of this process, with the FTA as the Federal Lead Agency and NICTD as the Local Project Sponsor responsible for implementing the Project under NEPA.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The environmental review process builds upon NICTD's prior West Lake Corridor studies that examined a broad range of alignments, technologies, and transit modes. The studies concluded a rail-based service between the Munster/Dyer area and Metra's Millennium Station in Downtown Chicago, shown in **Figure 2-1**, would best meet the transportation needs of the Northwest Indiana area. Thus, NICTD advanced a "Commuter Rail" Alternative for more detailed analysis in the DEIS. The DEIS also considers two additional build alternatives, the Indiana Harbor Belt (IHB) Alternative, and the Hammond Alternative. NEPA also requires consideration of a "No Build" Alternative to provide a basis for comparison to the build alternatives. In addition, a number of design variations are being considered related to alignment profile, stations, parking, and maintenance & storage facilities (see **Figure 2-2**).

2.1 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative is defined as the existing transportation system, plus any committed transportation improvements included in the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission's (NIRPC) *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* (CRP) (2011) and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) *Go To 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* (2014) through the planning horizon year 2040. It also includes capacity improvements to the existing Metra Electric District's (MED) line and Millennium Station, documented in NICTD's *20-Year Strategic Business Plan* (2014).

Figure 2-1 Regional Setting for West Lake Corridor Project

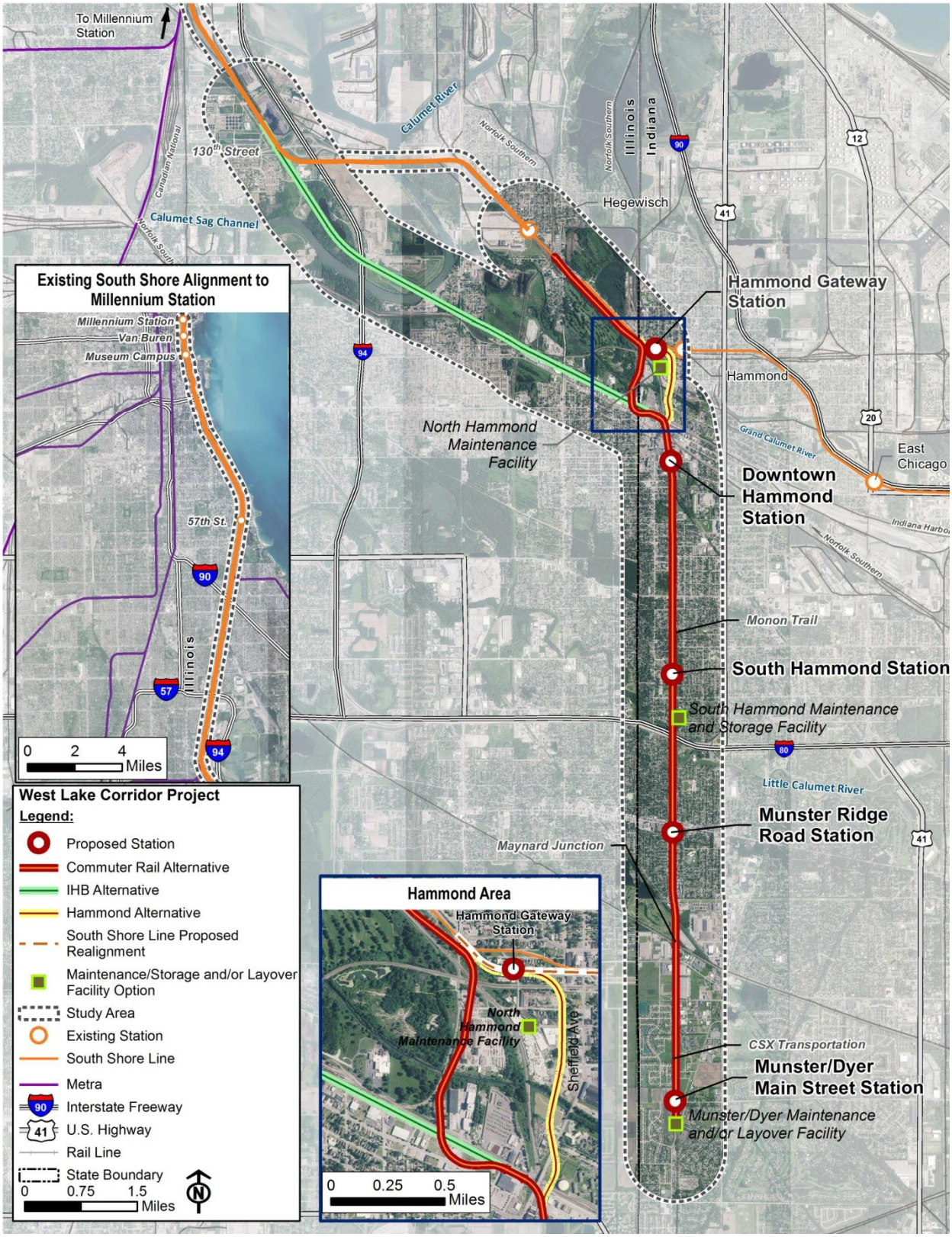

Figure 2-2 West Lake Corridor Project Study Area

2.2 Commuter Rail Alternative

The Commuter Rail Alternative would involve commuter rail service using electric powered trains on an approximate 9-mile southern extension of NICTD's existing South Shore Line (SSL) between Dyer and Hammond, Indiana (see **Figures 2-2** and **2-3**). Heading north from the southern terminus near Main Street at the Munster/Dyer border, the Project would include new track on a separate right-of-way adjacent to, and east of, the existing CSX freight line in Dyer and Munster. North of the proposed elevated crossing over another CSX freight line at the Maynard Junction, the proposed West Lake Corridor Project alignment would use the publically-owned former Monon railroad corridor in Munster and Hammond. North of Downtown Hammond the track alignment would turn west under Hohman Avenue, and then continue north on new elevated track generally along the Indiana/Illinois state line to connect to the existing SSL southeast of the Hegewisch Station in Chicago. West Lake Corridor Project trains would operate on the existing MED line for their final 14 miles, terminating at Millennium Station in Downtown Chicago. Station locations for the Commuter Rail Alternative include Munster/Dyer Main Street, Munster Ridge Road, South Hammond, and Downtown Hammond.

There are four design options to the Commuter Rail Alternative near the southern Project terminus, as follows:

- **Commuter Rail Alternative Option 1**: Under this design variation, parking for the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station would be located on the east side of the station, and a vehicle maintenance and storage facility would be located south of 173rd Street in Hammond near the South Hammond Station. See **Figure 2-3**.
- **Commuter Rail Alternative Option 2**: Under this design variation, parking for the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station would be located on the west side of the existing CSX freight line. Main Street would be extended west from Sheffield Avenue using an underpass to cross the CSX railroad and Project rights-of-way. The vehicle maintenance and storage facility would be located south of 173rd Street in Hammond near the South Hammond Station. See **Figure 2-3**.
- **Commuter Rail Alternative Option 3**: Under this design variation, the vehicle maintenance and storage facility would be located south of the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, on the east side of the existing CSX freight line, at Munster/Dyer Main Street, instead of south of the South Hammond Station. Parking for the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station would be located on the east side of the station. See **Figure 2-3**.
- **Commuter Rail Alternative Option 4**: Under this design variation, the rail alignment would be routed above the existing CSX freight rail line at Maynard Junction, to land on the west side of the CSX freight rail right-of-way, and then continue south to the Munster/Dyer Main Street area. The Munster/Dyer Main Street Station and parking would be located west of the existing CSX freight line. A Main Street extension west under the CSX freight rail line and the Project rights-of-way would be required. The vehicle maintenance and storage facility would be located south of 173rd Street in Hammond near the South Hammond Station. See **Figure 2-3**.

There are two design variations to the Commuter Rail Alternative related to the Project alignment, i.e., the IHB Alternative, and the Hammond Alternative as follows: See **Figures 2-4**, **2-5**, and **2-6**.

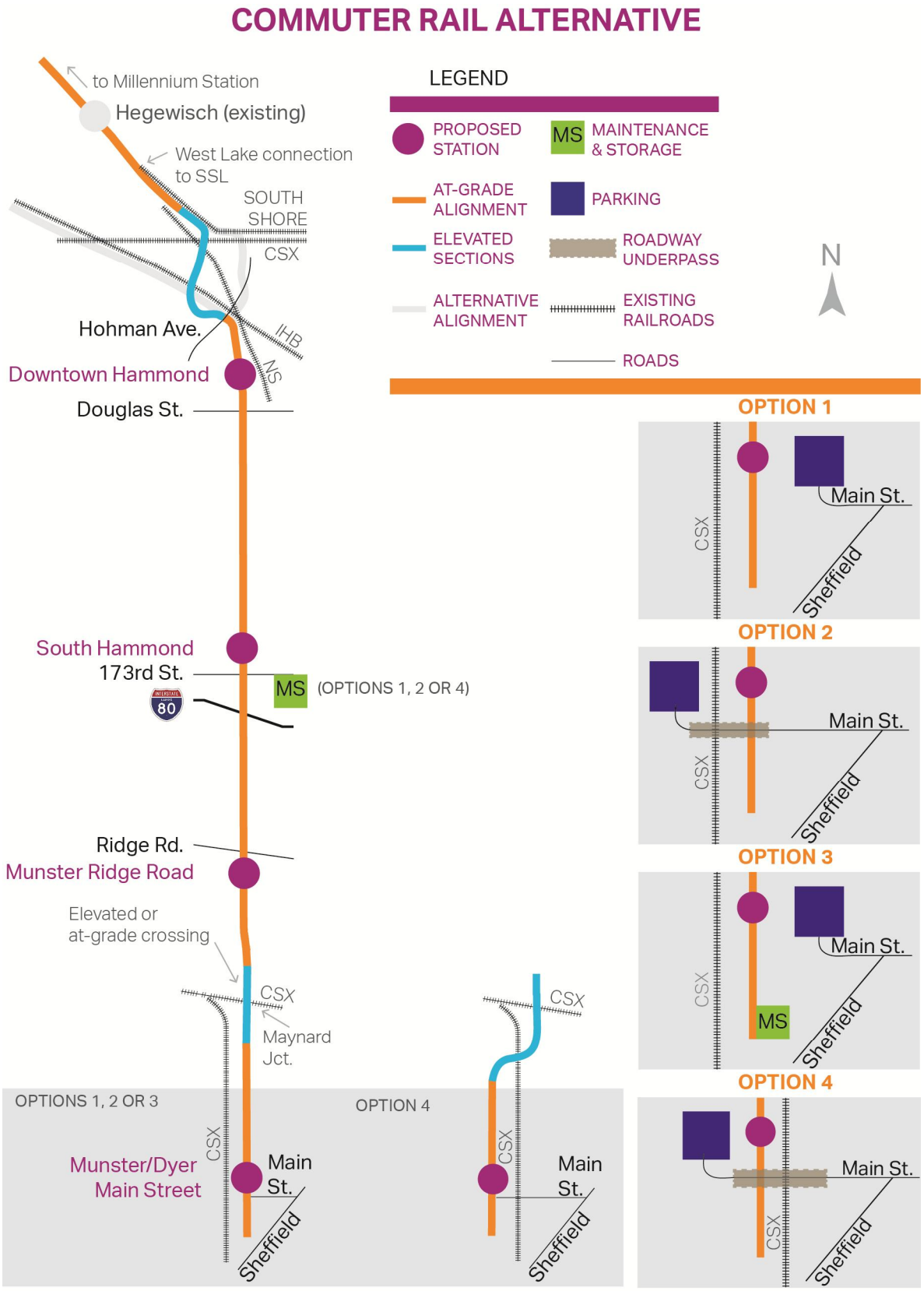

Figure 2-3 Commuter Rail Alternative and Options

2.3 Indiana Harbor Belt (IHB) Alternative

The IHB Alternative is a design variation to the Commuter Rail Alternative, with the main difference between the two alternatives being the use of the IHB railroad right-of-way instead of using the existing SSL through Hegewisch. See **Figure 2-4**. South of Douglas Street, the IHB Alternative is identical to the Commuter Rail Alternative and Options described above. From Downtown Hammond north of Douglas Street, the alignment of the IHB Alternative would turn west under Hohman Avenue in Hammond and would be constructed in the IHB railroad right-of-way west through Calumet City, Burnham, and Chicago, Illinois. West of Burnham Avenue, the IHB Alternative would bridge over the IHB and CSX freight rail lines, landing in the IHB Kensington Branch railroad right-of-way, and would include relocating and reconstructing the IHB freight railroad on adjacent track within the existing railroad right-of-way. The Project would then continue northwest to the proposed connection with the existing SSL near I-94 and 130th Street in Chicago.

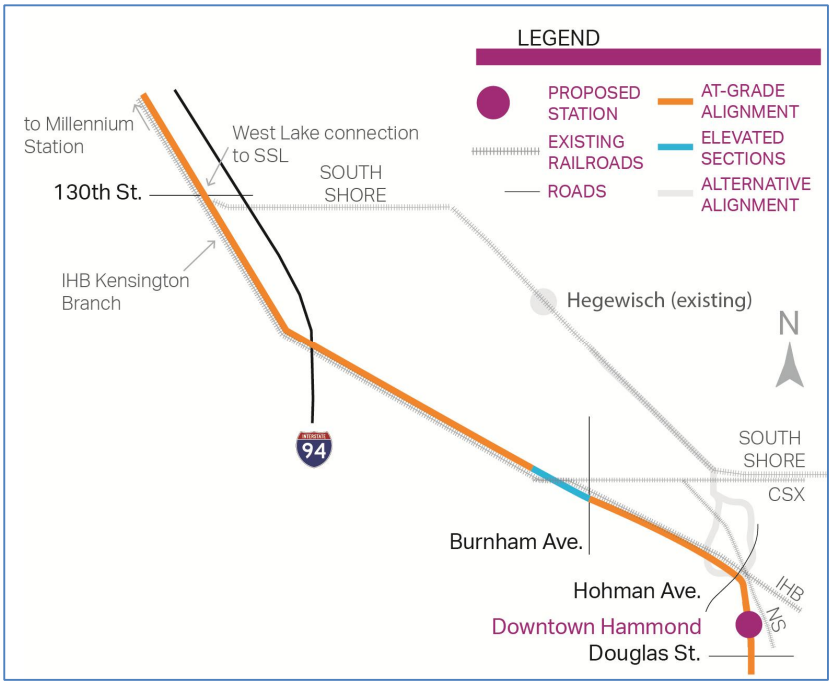

Figure 2-4 Indiana Harbor Belt Alternative

2.4 Hammond Alternative

The Hammond Alternative is a design variation to the Commuter Rail Alternative, with the main difference between the two alternatives being the rail alignment and station location in the north part of Hammond, Indiana. See **Figure 2-5**. South of Douglas Street, the Hammond Alternative is similar to the Commuter Rail Alternative described above. From Downtown Hammond north of Douglas Street, the Hammond Alternative would extend north on embankment and bridges crossing over the IHB and Norfolk Southern (NS) freight rail lines immediately east of the Hohman Avenue overpass. The alignment would then extend northward and cross over Hohman Avenue just south of Michigan Street. The alignment would then continue northwest, crossing over an existing CSX freight rail line, and connect with the existing SSL.

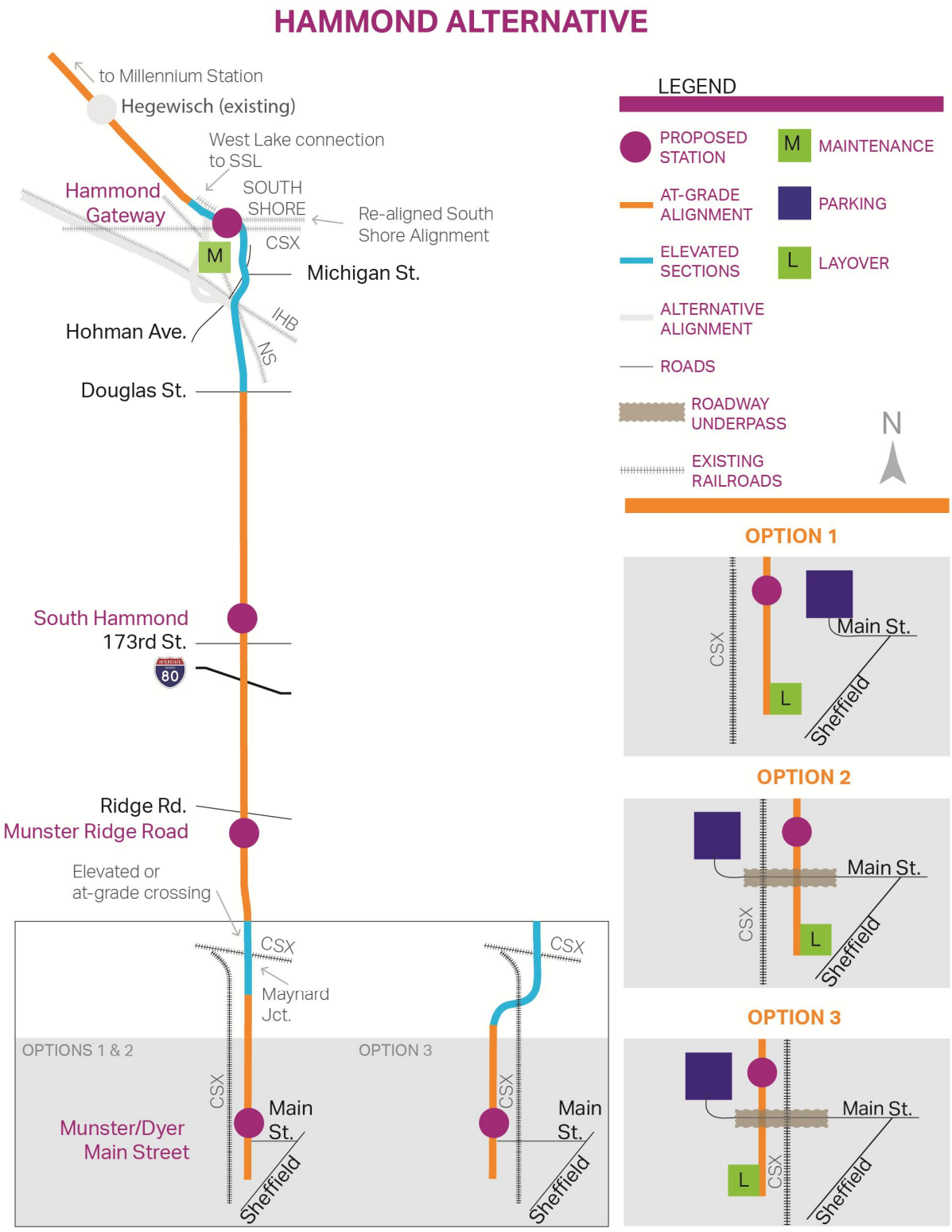

Figure 2-5 Hammond Alternative and Options

Under the Hammond Alternative, the Hammond Gateway Station would be constructed in North Hammond and would replace the existing SSL Hammond Station (see **Figure 2-5**). The Hammond Alternative also assumes the existing SSL track would be relocated between the

existing SSL Hammond Station and the Indiana/Illinois state line to facilitate a passenger connection between the Project and the SSL at the Hammond Gateway Station on the Hammond Alternative. **Figure 2-6** illustrates the SSL track relocation. The alignments of both routes would be adjacent to one another at this location allowing passengers to transfer at the combined station. During non-peak times, West Lake Corridor Project trains would operate as shuttles between Munster/Dyer Main Street Station and Hammond Gateway Station, making connections with SSL service.

Figure 2-6 South Shore Line Proposed Realignment

A maintenance facility would be located immediately south of the Hammond Gateway Station. A separate layover facility at the southern end of the Project corridor, near the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, would also be constructed, as shown on **Figure 2-5**. There are three design variations on how the layover facility, the Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, and the parking would be configured under the Hammond Alternative on as follows:

- **Hammond Alternative Option 1:** The Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, layover facility, and parking would be on the east side of the existing CSX freight line. See **Figure 2-5**.
- **Hammond Alternative Option 2:** The Munster/Dyer Main Street Station and layover facility would be on the east side of the existing CSX freight rail line, and the parking would be west of the CSX freight rail line. A Main Street extension west under the CSX freight rail line and Project rights-of-way would be required. See **Figure 2-5**.

- **Hammond Alternative Option 3:** This Option would require routing the Project rail alignment above the existing CSX freight rail line at Maynard Junction, landing on the west side of the CSX freight rail right-of-way, and continuing south to the Munster/Dyer Main Street area. The Munster/Dyer Main Street Station, layover facility, and parking would be located west of the existing CSX freight line. A Main Street extension west under the CSX freight rail line and the Project rights-of-way would be required. See **Figure 2-5**.

2.5 Maynard Junction Rail Profile Option

One design variation is being considered for each Build Alternative – the Maynard Junction Rail Profile Option. Under this design variation, at Maynard Junction in Munster, the alignment would cross the existing CSX freight line in an at-grade profile instead of an elevated profile. The proposed alignment would then remain east of the CSX freight rail line right-of-way as shown in the Commuter Rail Alternative Options 1, 2, and 3 in **Figure 2-3**, and the Hammond Alternative Options 1 and 2 in **Figure 2-5.**