



## J. Sebastian Smelko

Partner

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J. Sebastian Smelko is a partner and Vice Chair of the Government Affairs & Regulatory Law Group at Ice Miller in Indianapolis, where he advises public and private sector clients on infrastructure investment, economic development, government affairs, and public policy strategy. His practice sits at the intersection of law, government, and long-range institutional planning, with a focus on helping clients structure and advance complex initiatives that shape communities, modernize public systems, and drive durable economic growth.

Sebastian brings a balanced blend of legal, policy, and political experience to his work. Before joining Ice Miller, he served as General Counsel for the Ports of Indiana and as Policy Director and Assistant General Counsel in the office of former Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, where he gained firsthand experience in executive branch decision-making, legislative strategy, and the mechanics of turning ambitious policy ideas into actionable results.

His work spans public-private partnerships (P3s), regional development authorities, port and rail infrastructure, procurement, energy policy, broadband deployment, and utility-related initiatives. He has helped clients analyze project delivery methods, draft and advance legislation, align stakeholders, and build implementation strategies for projects that require both technical rigor and political durability.

Sebastian led the Ice Miller team representing the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority in connection with the largest commuter rail expansion in Indiana history, including the West Lake Corridor and the double tracking of the South Shore Line. He also helped develop and advance the legislative and strategic framework surrounding those projects, including drafting Indiana's first legislation designed to encourage transit-oriented development.

In addition to client work, Sebastian is a frequent speaker and writer on infrastructure, economic competitiveness, inland waterways, supply chains, public-private project delivery, and the future of local government modernization and regional collaboration. His thought leadership has appeared through platforms and publications including *Area Development*, *Supply & Demand Chain Executive*, and other professional forums, reflecting a broader interest in how governance and infrastructure must evolve to meet the demands of a changing economy.

### Services & Industries

- Economic Development Strategies & Incentives
- Election Security
- Energy & Utilities Law
- Gaming, Sports Betting & Alcohol Law
- Government Affairs & Regulatory Law
- Government
- Ice Miller Strategies - Federal Public Policy & Consulting
- Indiana Executive Order Hub
- Indiana Lobbying
- Procurement
- Public Infrastructure/Public-Private Partnerships (P3s)

He has been recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America*® for Government Relations Practice and is a Distinguished Fellow of the Indianapolis Bar Association. His professional and civic involvement has included leadership and committee service with organizations such as the Association for the Improvement of American Infrastructure (AIAl), Conexus Indiana, and Accelerate Indiana Municipalities (Aim), as well as broader community and civic organizations in Indiana.

Sebastian earned his B.S. in History and Policy & Decision Science from Carnegie Mellon University, where he received the Senior Leadership Award and was a three-year letter winner and captain of the football team. He earned his accelerated J.D. from Valparaiso University School of Law, where he also externed in the office of Governor Daniels. He is admitted to practice law in Indiana and Pennsylvania.

He is also a proud husband of another Ice Miller partner and the father of two daughters. Sebastian is also the owner of a Newfoundland—roles that continue to ground his work in a practical belief that leadership, policy, and development should ultimately serve people, families, and the long-term strength of the places they call home. He is a native of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania but is a proud Hoosier by Choice.

## **Education**

- Carnegie-Mellon University (B.S.)
  - History
  - Policy and Decision Science
- Valparaiso University School of Law (J.D.)
  - Accelerated

## **Admissions**

- Indiana
- Pennsylvania

## **Professional Affiliations**

- National Association of Bond Lawyers (NABL)
- Evaluator, Indiana State and Indianapolis Bar Association, IndyBar Review
- Member, International Association of Gaming Advisors
- Alumnus, FBI Citizens' Academy
- Alumnus, Indiana Leadership Forum
- Indiana State and Indianapolis Bar Associations
- Indiana Republican Party
- Marion County Republican Party
- Phi Delta Phi Legal Fraternity
- Beta Theta Pi National Fraternity
- The Federalist Society
- The Republican National Lawyers Association
- The Alliance 412

## **Awards & Honors**

- *The Best Lawyers in America*®, Government Relations Practice, 2025-2026

- Senior Leadership Award, Carnegie Mellon
- Team Captain and Three-Year Letter Winner, Carnegie Mellon Football
- Distinguished Fellow of the Indianapolis Bar Association

## Community Involvement

- Parishioner, St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church
- Speaker of the Indiana House of Representatives Appointee, Marion County Judicial Selection Committee
- Member, Conexus Indiana Committees - Public Private Partnership, Public Policy and State Freight Planning
- Member, Aim (Accelerate Indiana Municipalities) COVID-19 Recovery Taskforce
- Member, Aim (Accelerate Indiana Municipalities) Community and Economic Development Policy Committee
- Member, Association for the Improvement of American Infrastructure (AIAI) Committees - Operations and Maintenance Committee, Risk and Performance Committee and Water Infrastructure Committee
- Ballot Security Team and Election Judge, Marion County
- Mentor, Valparaiso Law Alumni Association
- Loyal Scot, Carnegie Mellon Alumni Association

## Success Stories

### Ice Miller Works with Indianapolis Public Schools for Education Initiative

Ice Miller, teaming with a working group of professionals serving Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) that included Stifel, Nicolaus & Company, Inc., Baker Tilly Municipal Advisors, Blaylock Van LLP, Loop Capital, and Policy Analytics, helped mentor students taking a high school-level banking and industry course to teach them the process of school capital funding through municipal bonds.

As a part of IPS's "Rebuilding Stronger" initiative, a referendum designed to upgrade and modernize schools and buildings within the IPS boundaries, students had the opportunity to witness the school corporation and its professional partners in action during a live class as IPS sold \$130 million in bonds to fund the first phase of the initiative. This sale was the first series of bonds and part of an aggregate approval of \$410M over three to four years. The students also learned more broadly about capital referendums, how the bond markets work, and various related legal issues.

Allowing students to observe the bond sale process was a way to involve them in the future of their school corporation and community, as well as introduce them to the business, finance, and public engagement side of how their government and the economy intersect.

Ice Miller Partner Erik Long served as bond counsel on the firm's behalf during the class presentation. Ice Miller has a long-standing relationship with IPS and has been working with the school corporation on the "Rebuilding Stronger" referendum, as well as other capital and strategic needs. The Ice Miller team also includes Jane Neuhauser Herndon, Kristin McNulty McClellan, Matt Miller, Amy Corsaro, Susan Price, Tom John, Sebastian Smelko, Lauren Siler, and Sallie Zubek.

### Ice Miller Represents Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority in Historic Commuter Rail Expansion

Ice Miller LLP represented the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority in connection with the NWI Rail Projects, helping to create the largest expansions of commuter rail systems in the state's history.

The two projects represent a nearly \$2 billion investment in capital projects, with an estimated \$3 billion overall economic impact to the region and the state in the next 20 years. The Double Track Project adds nearly 18 miles of new track over a 26-mile corridor along the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District's existing South Shore Line between Gary, Indiana and Michigan City, Indiana and makes multiple improvements to the existing line, while the West Lake Project adds a new line

approximately 8 miles within Lake County from Hammond to the Munster/Dyer line. This work also includes transit development districts within the communities and surrounding areas where the rail runs.

Ice Miller developed and advocated for the projects' procurement and financing legislation allowing for the delivery of the coordinated projects by three state-related entities. The firm also supported and acquired the significant appropriations from the Indiana General Assembly for the projects, developed a credit enhancing mechanism to codify local Lake County government units funding of aspects of the West Lake Corridor Project. The firm also primarily drafted the agreements between the parties, a first-of-its-kind transit development district statute in the state and provided overall strategic counsel and messaging to the state and local government and agencies.

The Ice Miller team was lead by partners [Sebastian Smelko](#), [Rebecca Seamands](#), [Phil Genetos](#) and [Audrey Howard](#).

## Thought Leadership

January 31, 2026

***Supply & Demand Chain Executive* | The UP-NS Merger: How a Coast to Coast Railroad Could Reshape U.S. Supply Chains**

*Supply & Demand Chain Executive*

Q3 2025

***Area Development* | Rethinking Local Governments Through Consolidation and Choice**

*Area Development*

June 27, 2025

**Setting Yourself up for Success: Effective Project Planning Provides the Keys to the Kingdom**

June 18, 2025

**Navigating Tariffs and Turbulence: How Inland Trade Zones Could Anchor America's Economic Future**

June 12, 2025

**The New Ohio eBingo and RVLTV Gaming Bill Introduced and What It Means**

January 31, 2025

**What Groundhog Day Can Teach Us About Government Policy**

June 10, 2022

**Legislative Updates from Indiana**

March 23, 2020

**Indiana's "Stay At Home" Order in Response to COVID-19**

## Speaking Engagements

- Adjunct Professor, Indiana University for V405 Law, Legislation and Policy
- Panelist, "Practice Insights for Planning and Executing Complex Projects," AIM Ideas Summit, October 23, 2025
- Keynote Speaker, "Navigating Change: Inland Waterways Policy and Infrastructure Under the Current Administration," Inland River Ports & Terminals (IPRT) Annual Conference, October 1, 2025
- Panelist, "Public Access and Records Requests," AIM Municipal Law Summit 2025, June 27, 2025

- Panelist, "Mastering P3 Success: Legal and Practical Insights for Planning and Executing Construction Projects," P3C Conference & Expo, April 8, 2025
- "Planning & Executing Complex Construction Projects," P3C Conference & Expo, December 4, 2024
- Panelist, "Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) and Public Finance," AIM Municipal Law Seminar 2024, June 21, 2024
- Panelist, "Water Infrastructure Upgrade Projects and P3: Your Secret Weapon", P3 Government Conference, December 6, 2023
- Speaker, "Strengthening the Bench: Equity, Inclusivity, and the Path to Judicial Selection," Indianapolis Bar Association, October 6, 2023
- Panelist, "The Electrification of Our Ports," P3 Electrified Summit, September 21, 2023
- Panelist, "Social Media and Public Access Considerations," 2022 AIM Indiana Webinar, August 25, 2022
- Panelist, "Using the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Statute and Structuring Considerations for P3s," Indiana Municipal Continuing Legal Education, August 24, 2022
- Panelist, "Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Statute," 2022 Indiana Conference of Mayors, August 11, 2022
- Panelist, "Opportunities Under the Build Transfer Statute and the Structures of Public Private Partnerships," 2022 Indiana Municipal Lawyers Association, June 23, 2022
- Moderator, "Opportunity Analysis for Large Infrastructure Projects: How Do You Stay Creative and Innovative While Working on a P3 Project?," 2021 P3 Conference, September 14, 2021
- Guest Lecturer, Indiana University SPEA Class - Public Policy & the Legislative Process
- Panelist, "Rail Projects Generations in the Making - How It Happened," P3 Government Conference, December 10, 2020
- Panelist, "How to Work With Your Advisors to Achieve Your Project Deliverables," Convention Sports and Entertainment Facilities Conference hosted by the Association for the Improvement of American Infrastructure (AIAI), August 14, 2020
- "The Opportunity Zone Program: Selecting Your Opportunity Zones (Indiana)" Webinar, March 14, 2018
- "The Opportunity Zone Program: Selecting Your Opportunity Zones (Indiana)" Webinar, March 8, 2018