

August 21, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and its members, I write to express my strong support for the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application for the Fiscal Year 2023 Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) program. This application was submitted on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) partners, including AAR, the Class I railroads, Metra, Amtrak, the State of Illinois, Cook County, and the City of Chicago. In addition, the local match includes significant contributions from all the CREATE partners.

IDOT will use this critical grant to fund a segment of the Belt Junction and 80th Street Junction Replacements (CREATE project EW2) that will address major freight and passenger rail congestion between the Dan Ryan Expressway and Western Avenue—a location where four freight railroads and Metra's SouthWest Service operations encounter, and often conflict with, each other. This EW2-A segment will replace, upgrade, add or remove 86 viaducts—many of which are over 110 years old—along the corridor and address the freight and passenger conflicts by reconfiguring Belt Railway Company (BRC), Norfolk Southern (NS), and Metra track and signal systems near Belt Junction. The project also includes significant improvement to the roadway, sidewalks, and lighting under the viaducts.

This project is part of the larger 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP), a grouping of four smaller projects that make up the most complex portion of the overall CREATE Program. Taken together, the four projects will address issues and improve capacity along two passenger routes and six freight rail lines. The first two components of the CIP project at Forest Hill (P3) and 71st Street (GS19) are under construction with the support of a 2018 INFRA grant. The remaining two components, projects EW2 and P2, are critical to ensure the complete benefits of the project.

IDOT's application meets many stated goals of the MPDG program. It will start to alleviate the congestion at one of the most congested rail chokepoint in North America: the Chicago Terminal Belt Junction, where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross each other's paths per day often causing delays that slow down the entire freight rail network and have a ripple effect throughout the region and the national supply chain. In addition, the full buildout of the projects will improve performance on the Amtrak Cardinal service by reducing freight conflicts in the vicinity of 80th Street and reducing delays across Amtrak's network.

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg

August 21, 2023

Page 2

Through those improvements, this project will also reduce the environmental impacts of rail operations in Chicago, particularly in underserved communities. Environmental justice is a critical part of the 75th Street CIP. CREATE is proud to maintain strong educational and workforce opportunities through this project and anticipates major community mobility improvements that will result, including improved safety, accessibility, quality of life, and better business and day-to-day opportunities through the community's enhanced visual appeal and better transit experiences. Neighboring communities will also benefit from cleaner air, reduced railroad delays, improved economic development, and a more fluid freight and passenger rail system.

Project EW2-A aligns with CREATE Program's overall goals to improve rail operations in the Chicago metropolitan area, reducing the environmental impacts of rail operations on the public while simultaneously improving the neighborhood and creating local jobs. Beyond the regional benefits, these improvements will have a major impact on the national supply chain. The efficiencies resulting from this project support the movement of people and consumer goods along important railway systems and communities throughout the nation.

AAR and its members fully support this application and look forward to the project's successful implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ian Jefferies", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Ian Jefferies