



Building the Future, One Connection at a Time

\$5.8B

TOTAL PROGRAM
INVESTMENT

36/70

COMPLETE

6

UNDER
CONSTRUCTION

6

FINAL DESIGN

8

ENVIRONMENTAL
REVIEW

14/70

REMAINING
PROJECTS

2025 was a year of big moves for the CREATE Program—moves that help Chicago move. With 15 public and private partners united behind one vision, CREATE is reshaping how people and goods travel through one of the nation’s most important transportation hubs. We celebrated a historic achievement as the Forest Hill Flyover (P3) officially entered operation—the largest project in our program to date and the 36th to reach completion. And we kept the momentum rolling, from construction at 71st Street (GS19) to next-phase progress on West Side Gateway/Ogden Junction (WA1) and 80th St Junction (EW2).

Just as important: CREATE continued to invest in communities every step of the way. Whether it was inspiring students through STEM learning, engaging residents at neighborhood meetings, or connecting local

workers to good-paying jobs. Last year underscored that forward motion only matters when it reaches everyone.

“Over the past year, CREATE delivered real, tangible progress for Chicago, the region and the nation,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Gia Biagi. “With the Forest Hill Flyover officially in operation and several major projects entering final design, we are turning longstanding challenges into opportunities for growth, building a safer, cleaner and more resilient transportation system for all.”

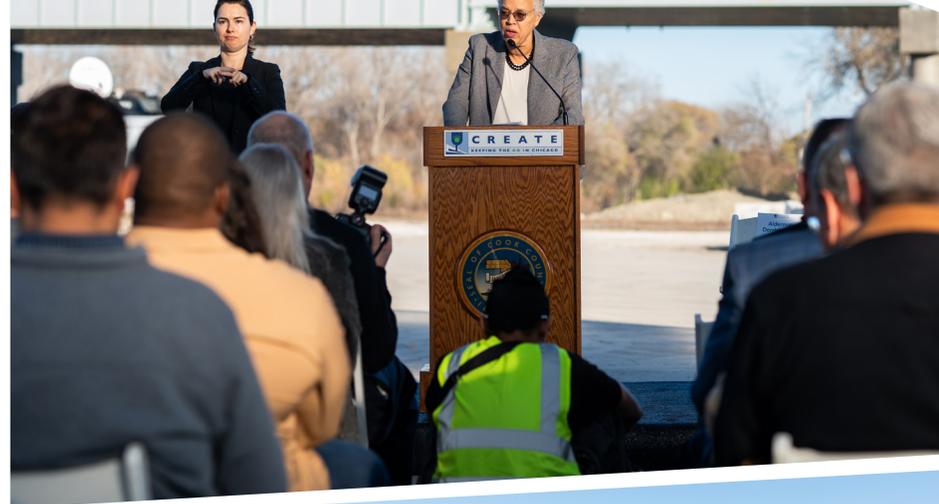
As we look ahead to 2026, we’re bringing that momentum forward: preparing multiple projects for construction, strengthening community partnerships, and continuing to invest in a future where progress lifts everyone.

Milestones That Matter

During 2025, the CREATE Program's delivery pipeline was active at every stage. Six projects were under construction – including major work at the Forest Hill Flyover (P3) and 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19) – while seven projects were in final design (Phase II) and eight were advancing through environmental review (Phase I). This mix of construction, design, and planning work keeps the remaining projects moving in a coordinated way, delivering visible improvements today while setting up the next wave of construction that will keep Chicago – and the nation – moving tomorrow.

2025 was the year the Forest Hill Flyover transitioned from construction to operation, unlocking new rail capacity on the south side while reducing conflicts between freight and commuter trains.

- » **July 2025** – Major structural work reached a key milestone with final girder placement, setting the stage for operational testing.
- » **October 2025** – The first test train crossed the new flyover, demonstrating how elevated freight movements now clear one of Chicago's most congested rail chokepoints.
- » **November 2025** – CREATE partners celebrated official operational completion, marking P3 as the 36th of 70 CREATE projects delivered and the largest in program history.



From Concept to Crossing

A critical component of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project, the Forest Hill Flyover eliminates a long-standing rail conflict point on Chicago's south side. With its recent operational launch, the project is now delivering measurable benefits to both rail operations and surrounding neighborhoods — demonstrating how modern infrastructure investments improve safety, reliability, and quality of life.

For decades, freight and commuter trains traveling through the 75th Street corridor were required to cross at grade — causing frequent delays at one of the region's most congested rail choke points. The Forest Hill Flyover was designed to remove that conflict by elevating north-south freight traffic over east-west movements, improving flow and operational reliability across multiple railroads. With the first

test train crossing in October 2025 and a ribbon-cutting event in November, the structure officially became the 36th CREATE project completed and the largest in program history.

Delivering the Forest Hill Flyover required significant structural upgrades and precise construction coordination within an active rail environment. The project introduced new steel and concrete elements, track realignment, and signal enhancements — all completed while maintaining safe rail operations.

These improvements also reduce blocked crossings and emissions in surrounding neighborhoods while supporting safer, more predictable travel connections on the south side.

Additional signal integration and operational coordination will continue into 2026 to ensure the flyover delivers its full intended benefits across the corridor, including improved routing efficiency and greater network resiliency.

39

Months of Total Construction Completed

25.3M

of 25.7M lbs of Structural Steel Fabricated and Delivered

8,356

of 9,750 Cubic Yards of Concrete Poured

298

of 344 Shafts Drilled





Expanding Momentum Across the Network

CREATE’s strength has always been in collaborative delivery – and that collaboration is now driving the next slate of improvements across the network. As 2025 closed, key projects advanced toward construction that will modernize aging infrastructure, enhance safety and access, and maintain Chicago’s leadership role in the national freight system.

West Side Gateway (WA1)

The CREATE partners closed 2025 with key steps forward on the West Side Gateway (WA1) project, setting the stage for major construction to begin in 2026.

A Big Step Toward Construction

WA1 will modernize a 1.9-mile stretch of the Union Pacific corridor along Rockwell Avenue

– replacing or rehabilitating 18 aging viaduct structures and upgrading lighting, sidewalks, and street-level safety conditions. The project will also introduce new powered switches, modern signaling, and track realignment to replace outdated operations that currently slow freight and shared passenger movements through the corridor.

At the summer pre-bid meeting, prime contractors received detailed construction, track, and signal information, along with guidance on contracting requirements and a walkthrough of the corridor. Following the pre-bid meeting prospective prime contractors hosted booths to meet with subcontractors to discuss teaming opportunities.

The bidding process began in July 2025 with bids due in December 2025. Contractor awards are anticipated in early 2026. Funded in partnership with a \$70M U.S. DOT INFRA grant, WA1 is now advancing toward construction, with work beginning in 2026 and completion expected in 2031.

Other Project Updates

These upcoming CREATE projects are advancing through design and bidding – each of them helping to unlock rail bottlenecks while improving daily travel for people living and working nearby.

PROJECT	CURRENT STATUS	COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS
Pullman Junction (EW3A)	Construction is underway	Reduces one of the south side's most complex freight bottlenecks, cutting down the amount of time trains idle near homes – supporting cleaner air and less neighborhood noise.
Columbus Avenue Grade Separation (GS11)	Construction is underway	Eliminates a 911-critical at-grade crossing by separating vehicle and rail traffic – reducing emergency response delays, improving safety for drivers and pedestrians, and cutting congestion and vehicle idling in nearby neighborhoods.
Metra Rock Island Bridge Raise (EW2)	Construction began in late 2025	Increasing clearance under the tracks will improve safety and reliability for Metra riders and freight traffic on a busy shared line.
Archer Avenue Grade Separation (GS9)	Contractor letting to be held Q1 2026	Separating vehicle and rail traffic near Archer & Kenton means fewer blocked crossings, better emergency response, and safer travel for people walking, driving, and biking.
West Side Gateway / Ogden Junction (WA1)	Construction starts in 2026	Replaces/repairs 18 aging bridges, improving safety, neighborhood connections, and rail reliability for Metra and multiple freight railroads.
71st Street Grade Separation (GS19)	Contractor letting planned for the third quarter in 2026	Eliminates a major conflict point between trains and neighborhood streets – reducing waiting times, easing access to local businesses, and improving safety near schools.
Dolton Interlocking (WA11)	Contractor letting planned for 2026	Reconfigures a complex rail junction to reduce train conflicts and delays – improving freight reliability, supporting safer operations near nearby neighborhoods, and strengthening regional rail efficiency.

Building Futures Along the Tracks

CREATE's progress isn't just measured in track miles — it's measured in opportunities. This year, partners continued strengthening connections between residents, small businesses, and future engineers throughout Chicago.



Opening Doors for Small Businesses

In February 2025, a subcontractor networking event — hosted at HIRE360 — brought together local firms and prime contractors to discuss upcoming opportunities for the West Side Gateway (WA1) project including concrete and asphalt work, landscaping and streetscapes, structural repair and demolition, and stormwater and traffic-control services. Livestreaming the session ensured small businesses across the region could learn about ways to participate in upcoming CREATE projects.

Potential prime contractors for WA1 West Side Gateway hosted booths at a networking event in August. This provided small businesses the opportunity to introduce themselves and seek out teaming arrangements.



Workforce Development

On December 3, 2025, a Union Outreach Event at Hamilton Park Fieldhouse connected south side residents with apprenticeship programs and construction career opportunities — ensuring project benefits extend directly into surrounding communities. Programs like HCCTP, the Illinois Highway Construction Careers Training Program, offer free, 12-week hands-on training to prepare participants for union apprenticeships and continue to diversify the regional construction workforce. Dawson Technical Institute help make these pathways accessible for residents ready to start stable, well-paying careers.



STEM + Education

CREATE's story is about more than tracks and trains — it's about people. Through its partnership with Chicago Public Schools and the Children's First Fund, the Program has invested over \$800,000 in hands-on STEM education on the south and west sides.

In 2025, the 75th Street CIP Education Initiative brought engineering learning to three neighborhood schools:

- » **A. Phillip Randolph School** — The eighth-grade class at A Phillip Randolph School participated in the first CREATE in the Classroom bridge building competition. Guided by project engineers, the students presented model bridges that they designed and built, demonstrating great enthusiasm for practical STEM learning and teamwork.
- » **Simeon Career Academy** — A two-day workshop was held for a group of students. The first day presentations were made and instruction on building a model bridge were given and students spent the rest of the time constructing their bridge. The second day each team's bridge was weight tested for durability, reviewed by a panel of judges and awards were presented. Students also began a Request for Proposals challenge mirroring CREATE's real-world decision-making process and will pitch transportation improvements to CREATE partners early in 2026.
- » **Foster Park Elementary** — Sixteen sixth graders designed and load-tested their own model bridges inspired by CREATE's flyovers and grade separations. The event also featured a question-and-answer session where students got to ask CREATE partners about becoming engineers. This event was the first opportunity for CREATE partners to directly engage staff and students at Foster Park Elementary School — a first-time recipient of the CREATE Education Commitments Grant Award.



Student Spotlight

From Classroom to Career

“CREATE gave me confidence. It showed me what I’m learning matters, and that I belong in this field.”

For Khamani Baptiste, the path to engineering started in his own neighborhood. As a student at Simeon Career Academy, he participated in CREATE’s 75th Street education initiatives — including a real-world project competition modeled after how major rail improvements are planned and delivered. Through that experience, he connected with CREATE partners and discovered career paths he’d never considered before.

He later joined the Junior Mentor Protégé Program, gaining hands-on exposure to transportation and infrastructure engineering through internships with firms contributing to CREATE. Those roles strengthened his skills in project planning and reinforced the importance of safety, community priorities, and collaboration in major rail work.

Today, he is pursuing a future in civil and transportation engineering and recently secured a competitive summer internship with Kiewit — opening the door to new experience, new mentors, and a meaningful career supporting community mobility.

“CREATE gave me confidence,” Baptiste said. “It showed me what I’m learning matters, and that I belong in this field.”

He is one of many young people building futures along the tracks — a reminder that CREATE is improving more than infrastructure. It’s helping shape the next generation of leaders who will keep Chicago and America moving.



KHAMANI BAPTISTE



Commercial Club
September 2025



T.H.E. Conference
February 2025

Sharing Success Across the Nation

As CREATE advances major construction at home, national attention continues to grow around Chicago's leadership in rail efficiency, community benefits, and collaborative delivery.

Bringing Partners On-Site

In September, the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago met at the CTCO offices for an introduction and presentation on the CREATE Program. Participants then toured the corridor to explore CREATE's connection to on-time performance and national supply chain reliability. This allowed business leaders to get a better understanding of the freight movement process and how it impacts their businesses.

During the APA-IL Conference in

October, planners from across the state joined CREATE partners for a behind-the-scenes tour of Landers Yard and Forest Hill Flyover — seeing firsthand how freight improvements also support neighborhood access and safety.

Conference Participation

CREATE partners shared insights at more than a half-dozen regional and national forums — including Today's Challenges – Tomorrow's Reward, Transport Chicago, Illinois Transportation and Highway Engineering (T.H.E.), IDOT Fall Planning Conference, UIC Urban Transportation Center presentations, and the RAO/IAR Annual Meeting — engaging hundreds of transportation professionals, planners, and community leaders.

National Knowledge Exchange

The cross-country collaboration with Houston, Texas began in April, when Union Pacific Railroad (UP) invited a delegation of about 20 leaders from Houston to Chicago for an in-depth discussion on grade separations and rail-safety challenges. The trip gave Houston officials firsthand exposure to Chicago's corridor design, public private partnership strategy, and community-sensitive rail infrastructure.

Building on that exchange, in July Houston hosted a reciprocal event: CREATE partners traveled to Houston

to present the full CREATE model — from community engagement to funding, planning and construction — to local officials and transportation professionals. The presentation highlighted how grade separations, coordinated funding, and public-private collaboration can substantially reduce rail delays, improve safety, and support equitable mobility and economic growth.

This two-way knowledge exchange underscores CREATE's growing influence beyond Illinois: by sharing Chicago's lessons learned, the program is helping other cities consider scalable rail-modernization strategies tailored to local needs.

Media Spotlight

National rail and infrastructure media took notice of CREATE's momentum in 2025 — and they had a lot to say. In July, Railway Track & Structures published a feature titled Power Behind the Rails: RT&S 2025 Women in Rail Engineering, highlighting leaders and engineers shaping the future of freight and passenger mobility — including those contributing to CREATE's success. The article amplified the technical expertise and diverse perspectives driving modernization across Chicago's rail network.

Trains.com and Progressive Railroading spotlighted the moment the first CSX train rolled over the new Forest Hill Flyover — calling out how the structure untangles one of Chicago's worst chokepoints by lifting freight traffic up and over Metra's SouthWest Service. Coverage emphasized that these improvements are delivering real-world benefits now, not years from now.

Featured highlights included:

- » A smarter, safer network with freight and passenger trains no longer crossing paths
- » Faster, more reliable movement of goods in and out of Chicago
- » Local benefits for south side neighborhoods through less noise and fewer delays

Meanwhile, Engineering News-Record took a wider-angle look — profiling CREATE as a model public-private partnership delivering modernization at a national scale. The Forest Hill Flyover — a nearly \$390 million investment — was showcased as the kind of targeted infrastructure that can unlock capacity across the U.S. freight rail system.

These stories build on earlier progress coverage from Chicago Construction News, which followed visible construction work at both Forest Hill and the 71st Street Grade Separation, underscoring how long-term planning and partnership are paying off today.



Media Themes in 2025

- + National economic impact rooted in Chicago
- + Big outcomes fueled by collaboration
- + Community mobility improvements baked into project design
- + Results delivered — ongoing commitments now realized in operation

From local classrooms to national supply chains, CREATE's message is resonating - when infrastructure works better for Chicago, it works better for America.

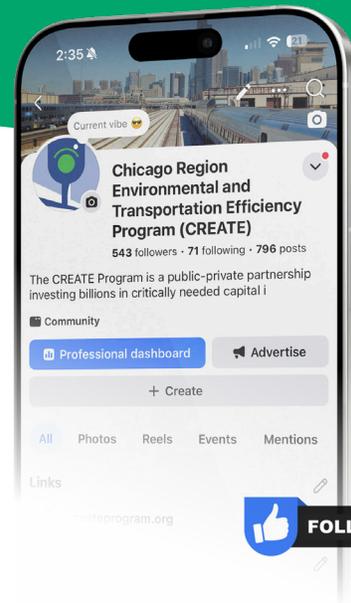
Looking Ahead — Next Stop: 2026

2026 promises to be another landmark year. Mobilization of the WA1 Westside Gateway corridor project will kick off in early spring, laying vital groundwork for expanded freight capacity. At the same time, the Archer Avenue Grade Separation (GS9) construction will begin — offering faster, more frequent commuter connections while reducing freight-passenger interference. Concurrently, we will continue investing in workforce development and rail-system innovation: training new technicians, upgrading signal and communication systems, and deploying data-driven tools for real-time traffic management. This layered approach ensures that infrastructure upgrades go hand in hand with human and technological capacity building.

Stay on Track with CREATE Progress That Moves Everyone Forward

From delivering major operational improvements like Forest Hill Flyover to advancing a new generation of grade separations and corridor modernization, 2025 proved that CREATE is making a real difference — for Chicago’s neighborhoods, for workers and local businesses, and for the national supply chain that depends on efficient freight movement.

With construction ramping up across multiple corridors in 2026, CREATE remains focused on what matters most: safer streets, stronger communities, and a resilient rail network that keeps the region and the country moving.



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CREATE Program Partners

