



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

December 9, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

The Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC) fully supports the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application for the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program. This grant will fund the Rock Island Connection project, known as P2. The project focuses on constructing a flyover bridge between Belt Junction and Metra Commuter Rail's Rock Island District line. Implementing P2 will enable Metra to shift its Southwest Service trains to the Rock Island line, ultimately reducing congestion and conflicts between freight and passenger service in and out of Belt Junction, where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross each other's paths each day. Commuter trips will also then terminate at LaSalle Street Station, versus Chicago Union Station, thereby shortening average travel times for commuters, and enabling Amtrak's intercity passenger rail service to be expanded in the Midwest by opening capacity at Union Station.

This project is a key part of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) - a grouping of four major improvements that make up the most complex portion of the overall CREATE Program. These four improvements are being advanced as a single project due to their logistical and environmental linkages. The first two components of the CIP (projects P3 and GS19) began construction in October 2022 with the support of a 2018 INFRA grant and are on schedule for completion in 2026. In 2024, the next phase of the 75th St CIP (Project EW2A) was awarded funding for construction, which will commence in 2026. The remaining two project components of P2 and other segments of EW2A are important to ensure the full benefits of the overall project.

Project P2 helps achieve the CREATE Program's overall goals to improve rail operations in the Chicago metropolitan area and improve quality of life in neighborhoods near rail. These improvements will also have significant positive impacts on the national supply chain. Efficiencies resulting from this project support the movement of people and consumer goods throughout the nation. P2 support broader economic growth, and neighboring communities also benefit from cleaner air, reduced railroad delays, and improved development opportunities.

ELPC fully supports this application and looks forward to the project's successful implementation.

Sincerely,

Howard Learner
Executive Director

HQ: 35 East Wacker Drive, Suite 1600 • Chicago, Illinois 60601
(312) 673-6500 • www.ELPC.org