

STATE OF ILLINOIS



ILLINOIS COMMERCE COMMISSION

Brian Verduyse

Rail Safety Program Administrator

December 11, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Illinois Commerce Commission is fully supportive of IDOT's application for the **Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) 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 (RID) line. Implementing P2 will enable Metra to shift its SouthWest Service (SWS) trains to the RID 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. By implementing P2, commuter trips will also now terminate at LaSalle Street Station, versus Chicago Union Station (CUS), serving to shorten the average travel time for commuters, and enabling an expansion of Amtrak's intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest, by opening capacity at CUS.

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 MPDG funding for construction, which will commence in 2026. The remaining two project components of the 75th Street CIP, P2 and other segments of EW2, are critical 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. Beyond these local and regional benefits, these improvements will have a significant positive impact on the national supply chain. The efficiencies resulting from this project support the movement of people and consumer goods throughout the nation. The 75th St CIP project includes investments in K-12 education and workforce opportunities as well as community mobility improvements (CMI). These CMIs enhance the safety, accessibility, quality of life, and visual appeal of the community while enhancing local transportation systems for people walking, bicycling, taking transit, and

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driving. Not only does P2 support broader economic growth, but neighboring communities also benefit from cleaner air, reduced railroad delays, and improved development opportunities.

As noted here and in ICC Chairman Scott's letter of May 22, 2024 (attached), the ICC fully supports the 75th Street CIP and this application. The ICC looks forward to continued coordination and partnership with the Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Highway Administration, Illinois Department of Transportation, and other CREATE Partners. If you have any questions, or need additional information, please contact me at (312) 636-7760 or brian.vercruysse@illinois.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Vercruysse". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Brian Vercruysse, P.E.
Rail Safety Program Administrator

STATE OF ILLINOIS



ILLINOIS COMMERCE COMMISSION

Douglas P. Scott

Chairman

May 22, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: CREATE 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project:

- Project P3 - Forest Hill Flyover (*under construction*)
- Project GS 19 - 71st Street Grade Separation (*under construction*)
- Project P2 – Rock Island Connection
- **Project EW2 – Belt Junction & 80th Street Junction Replacements Grant Applications First Segment EW2a (Western Avenue to 76th Street)**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) is fully supportive of the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) applications for the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG) and Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Programs funding on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program. These grants will fund Project Segment EW2a, which will lead the staging efforts towards completion of the Belt Junction & 80th Street Junction Replacements (EW2).


CREATE's most complex project, the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP), is comprised of the four major improvement projects referenced above. The first two components began construction in October 2022 with the support of a 2018 INFRA grant and are on schedule for completion in 2026. The remaining two project components are critical to ensure the full benefits of the 75th Street CIP. Project EW2 will alleviate the most congested rail chokepoint in North America - Chicago's Belt Junction, where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains cross each other's paths each day.

Project Segment EW2a will reconfigure Belt Railway Company (BRC), Norfolk Southern (NS), and Metra tracks and rebuild 14 century-old railroad structures providing a significant public safety benefit and improved connectivity on local streets in three South Side Chicago neighborhoods. As the agency with authority of public highway-rail crossings in Illinois, the Commission and its Staff are aware of the need to address the City of Chicago's 830+ railroad viaducts and ensure that they are maintained, rehabilitated, or reconstructed to address structural integrity, as well as public safety under the railroad structures. Project Segment EW2a addresses these safety needs and will move the 75th CIP closer towards its goal of providing a safer, more efficient transportation network along the corridor that benefits local neighborhoods, the State of Illinois, and Nation.

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The ICC looks forward to continued coordination and partnership with the Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Highway Administration, Illinois Department of Transportation, and other CREATE Partners to produce safe, efficient, and climate-friendly alternatives for safely moving people and freight. If you have any questions, or need additional information, please contact me at (312) 814-8592 or doug.scott@illinois.gov

Sincerely,


Douglas P. Scott
Chairman

cc: Amit Bose, Administrator Federal Railroad Administration
Shailen Bhatt, Administrator Federal Highway Administration
Omer Osman, Secretary of Transportation Illinois Department of Transportation
William C. Thompson, CREATE Chief Engineer