

December 16, 2024

Amit Bose  
Administrator  
Federal Railroad Administration  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

**RE: Support for IDOT FY24 FSP-National Application - CREATE Project P2**

Dear Administrator Bose:

Metra is pleased to provide this letter of support for the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application to the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail-National (FSP-National) program for the construction phase of Project P2. Project P2 is currently in the Final Design phase and is expected to complete design in 2025. A grant award will allow the construction phase to proceed without delay, which will benefit Amtrak's intercity passenger rail service, Metra's SouthWest Service (SWS) Line, and the national supply chain.

The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) is a public-private partnership founded in 2023 by the public agencies of Amtrak, IDOT, Metra, Cook County, and the City of Chicago and private railroads including six of the seven North American Class I railroads as well as short line railroads in the region. The partnership grew out of a Federal Surface Transportation Board task force that was formed in response to the growing urgency around the Chicago region's freight and passenger rail capacity needs.

Metra, IDOT, and the CREATE Partners have coordinated consistently during the scoping and design of Project P2. The project is the final major component of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Program (75th St CIP) which will drastically improve the movement of freight through one of the most congested railroad corridors on the National Freight Network. Project P2 will build off the other three 75<sup>th</sup> St. CIP Projects: the Forest Hill Flyover (P3) and 71st Street Grade Separation (GS19) project, both of which are currently under construction, and the 80<sup>th</sup> Street Junction Replacements (EW2), which will be starting construction shortly.

Grant funding for IDOT's CREATE Project P2 application will enable future increased Amtrak service to better serve the Chicago hub as is called for in FRA's Midwest Regional Rail Plan. Amtrak intercity passenger rail train slots will be freed up at Chicago Union Station, the nation's fourth-busiest station, as P2 allows for Metra's SWS Line trains to shift from Union Station and instead terminate at LaSalle Street Station. Currently, Amtrak operates over 50 daily trains that originate from Union Station. Federal funding from this round of FSP-National will bolster the

partnership between Amtrak and IDOT to add more service capacity for intercity passenger rail trains while reducing conflicts with freight trains and Metra's regional passenger trains.

In 2019, prior to the pandemic, ridership on Amtrak's Cardinal service was 109,000 and Metra carried over 2.3 million passengers on the SWS Line and 7.3 million passengers on the Rock Island Line. Upon completion of CREATE Project P2, the Amtrak Cardinal service performance is expected to improve by eliminating freight conflicts. Metra will have the capability to revise passenger train schedules to meet changing ridership characteristics and better serve Historically Disadvantaged Communities along these two lines.

Constructing CREATE Project P2 will eliminate the most congested rail chokepoint in the Chicago Terminal, Belt Junction, where 30 Metra and 90 freight trains per day cross each other's paths. The rail-rail flyover at 75th Street will eliminate conflict between 30 SouthWest Service Metra trains and 35 freight trains operating on the Western Avenue Corridor (CSX). The railroad infrastructure will be grounded with numerous community mobility improvements. In the surrounding neighborhoods within 1/4 mile of the railroad work, sidewalk and curb repairs will be completed to improve street network connectivity. The project will also repair streets under viaducts which include pavement sidewalks, ADA curb street repaving, tree planting, bus stop and pedestrian safety upgrades, improved ramps, and new LED street lighting.

**Metra will contribute \$25,000,000 of the required Non-Federal match funds comprised of Illinois PAYGO funding to the CREATE P2 Project.**

Metra strongly supports IDOT's application for the CREATE Project P2 application, which invests in the region's rail network and provides benefits to both passenger and freight rail in Disadvantaged Communities. FRA FSP-National funding will enable the project to proceed expeditiously to relieve one of the most congested rail chokepoints in the Chicago Terminal and the State of Illinois and various safety, speed, and state of good repair improvements will be implemented. Metra looks forward to continuing our partnership with IDOT and CREATE Partners to complete these critical projects. As such, I urge you to consider funding IDOT's CREATE Project P2 application through the FSP-National program.

Sincerely,



Jim Derwinski  
CEO/Executive Director