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Senator Ram Villivalam

*Illinois State Senate
8th Legislative District*

December 5, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

As State Senator for the Illinois 8th Senate District and Chairman of the Illinois Senate Transportation Committee, I am writing to express my support of the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) 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 driving. Not only does P2 support broader economic growth, but neighboring communities also benefit from cleaner air, reduced railroad delays, and improved development opportunities.

In keeping with the existing rules and regulations, I urge you to give the IDOT's application a full and fair consideration. If you have any questions or would like to discuss my recommendation further, please do not hesitate to reach out. I can be reached at 872-208-5188 and info@senatorram.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ram Villivalam". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ram Villivalam

State Senator, 8th District

Chair of Illinois Senate Transportation Committee