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December 22, 2025

The Honorable David A. Fink
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: NIRPC Support for P2 project from National Railroad Partnership Program

Dear Administrator Fink:

On behalf of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the northwest corner of Indiana in the Chicago Metropolitan Area, I lend our full support for the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application, on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, for funding through the National Railroad Partnership Program.

The CREATE Program is the largest public-private partnership of its kind, involving the nation's rail industry and all levels of government. Although the Rock Island Connection project is located in Illinois, it will generate mobility, safety, and economic benefits for Northwest Indiana, which is the eastern gateway to the Chicago rail hub.

Northwest Indiana contains 863 at-grade crossings. Congestion and conflict in Chicago directly spills over into our region resulting in blockages at the more than 850 at-grade crossings throughout the region. These blockages delay motorists and pedestrians, decrease air quality, and increase emergency response times. Rail crossing blockage was identified as one of the most significant freight issues in our region's Metropolitan Transportation Plan, NWI 2050+ (www.in.gov/nirpc/transportation/nwi-2050-plus).

Federal funding will advance CREATE's Rock Island Connection project (P2), the next phase of the larger 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project, which will construct a flyover bridge to eliminate a major chokepoint and reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains. P2 directly aligns with the goals of the National Railroad Partnership Program by improving reliability, travel times, and safety for both passenger and freight trains in the country's most congested rail terminal. P2 is necessary to fully realize the delay reductions for freight rail users at Belt Junction once passenger trains are separated from freight traffic.

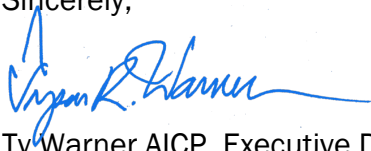
This project addresses that issue by reducing conflicts between freight and passenger trains in the corridor, which use the same tracks at the Belt Junction. Because passenger trains are prioritized, freight trains are curtailed at least twice daily on the corridor, during peak morning and afternoon commuting periods (totaling six hours daily) and occasionally during non-peak periods. Rerouting Metra SWS using the P2 bridge will improve freight flows through Belt Junction, particularly to and from the adjacent NS Landers Intermodal Yard (which reported 382,329 annual lifts in 2023).

The P2 project is also critical to improving passenger rail performance across the Chicago terminal and the Midwest. Chicago's Union Station (CUS) is the National Network's busiest station, home to 17 intercity lines and serving more than 3 million customers annually. P2 will greatly improve the reliability of passenger rail service at CUS by allowing Metra to direct 30 daily trains away from CUS to the LaSalle Street Station. This change strengthens Amtrak's ability to provide reliable service with improved travel times and reduced freight conflicts for intercity rail service across the Midwest, including the Cardinal route, which connects New York Penn Station and Chicago Union Station with a stop in Northwest Indiana at the Town of Dyer before continuing on to major destinations including Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia.

The P2 project advances the CREATE Program's overarching goals, increasing the efficiency, capacity, safety, and reliability of passenger and freight rail throughout Chicago and the nation. Chicago is the nation's premier freight hub, handling nearly **half of all intermodal containers** and **one-third of U.S. carload freight**. This investment is not merely an infrastructure upgrade; it is pivotal step toward enhancing supply chain resilience and driving economic growth nationwide.

We fully support this application and look forward to the successful implementation of the P2 project with your award of the National Railroad Partnership Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ty Warner".

Ty Warner AICP, Executive Director
Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC)

cc: Tom Vander Woude, NIRPC Director of Transportation