

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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January 15, 2026

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

Dear Mr. Fink:

On behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, I am writing in support of the Illinois Department of Transportation's application for National Railroad Partnership Program (NRPP) funding for construction of the Rock Island Connection project (P2), which is part of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program.

The Rock Island Connection project will construct a flyover bridge to eliminate a major rail chokepoint and reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains. Along this corridor, freight railroads currently operate approximately 90 daily trains, Metra operates 30 daily SouthWest Service (SWS) trains, and Amtrak operates three weekly Cardinal service trains. The project will significantly decrease delays experienced by freight trains, especially during peak morning and afternoon Metra commuting periods. The project will also allow Metra to divert SWS trains from Chicago Union Station (CUS) to the LaSalle Street Station, freeing up capacity at CUS for Amtrak.

The Rock Island Connection project will help advance the CREATE Program's goal of increasing the efficiency, capacity, safety, and reliability of freight and passenger service throughout the Chicago metropolitan region and the nation. Chicago is the nation's primary freight rail hub, handling approximately half of all intermodal containers and a third of the nation's carload freight traffic. Chicago also is an epicenter of passenger rail service, with Metra and the South Shore Line operating 15 routes throughout the Chicago region, and Amtrak operating 17 routes that directly connect Chicago with cities in 39 states. The CREATE Program serves to enhance supply chain resilience, enable future improvements to Amtrak and Metra passenger rail service, and drive economic growth nationwide.

The Rock Island Connection project is consistent with the recommendations of VISION 2050, Southeastern Wisconsin's long-range regional land use and transportation plan. VISION 2050 recommends supporting efforts outside of Southeastern Wisconsin that improve freight movement to and from the Region, and the plan specifically highlights the CREATE Program as an example of such an effort. VISION 2050 also recommends improvements to passenger rail service in Wisconsin, including routes connecting Southeastern Wisconsin to Chicago. Wisconsin passenger rail travelers will benefit from improved connecting services enabled by the Rock Island Connection project.

Mr. David A. Fink
January 15, 2026
Page 2

We ask the Federal Railroad Administration to carefully consider this project and the benefits it will provide for both the Northeastern Illinois and Southeastern Wisconsin regions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Stephanie', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephanie Hacker, AICP, LEED AP
Executive Director

ESJ/esj/mid
#279602 – IDOT NRPP Grant Application – CREATE – Letter of Support

cc: Ms. Gia Biagi, Secretary, Illinois Department of Transportation
Ms. Erin Aleman, Executive Director, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Ms. Kristina Boardman, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Transportation