

May 2, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

On behalf of the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and its members, I write to express my strong support for the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application for the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) program and the Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) program. This application was submitted on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) partners, including AAR, the Class I railroads, Metra, Amtrak, the State of Illinois, Cook County, and the City of Chicago.

These grants will fund the first segment of the Belt Junction and 80th Street Junction Replacements project, known as EW2a. The project will reconfigure the Belt Railway Corporation (BRC) main tracks between the Dan Ryan Expressway and Belt Junction, where four freight railroad tracks intersect and overlap with Metra's SouthWest Service. This work will be instrumental in alleviating the most congested rail chokepoint in North America, Chicago's Belt Junction, where 30 Metra trains and 90 freight trains cross each other every day. In addition, the EW2a segment will rebuild 14 century old railroad structures, including 86 bridges, over local streets in three South Side Chicago neighborhoods improving neighborhood connectivity, economic activity, and quality of life for underserved communities.

Importantly, this project is a key part of the 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project (CIP) – the most complex, most impactful portion of the overall CREATE Program. 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. The remaining two projects of the 75th Street CIP (projects EW2 and P2) are critical to ensure the full benefits of CREATE as a whole. Due to the scope and size of EW2, it has been broken out into multiple segments.

Completion of EW2a through this grant application is absolutely essential to advancing the broader goals of CREATE. In particular, EW2 is a necessary prerequisite to start construction of

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P2, the new passenger connection to the Rock Island Corridor for Amtrak and Metra that will allow Metra to shift out of Union Station and into the LaSalle Street station. That move will allow Metra and Amtrak service to improve and expand and is critical to achieving the CREATE Program's overarching goal of improving rail operations and quality of life in the Chicago metropolitan area.

The 75th Street CIP includes long-term investments in K-12 education and outstanding workforce support opportunities. The project also makes major community mobility improvements that will enhance the safety, accessibility, quality of life, and aesthetics of the community while improving transportation systems for people walking, biking, taking public transit, and driving in the area. Project EW2a will also improve the community through clean air, reduced railroad delays and improved economic development opportunities. Beyond these local and regional benefits, the national supply chain will benefit from the efficiencies created by this project through the improved movement of people and consumer goods throughout the nation.

AAR and its members fully support this application and look forward to the projects' successful implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ian Jefferies", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ian Jefferies