



**ASSOCIATION OF  
AMERICAN RAILROADS**

**IAN N. JEFFERIES**

President & CEO

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June 16, 2026

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

Dear Administrator Fink:

The Association of American Railroads (AAR) fully supports the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application, on behalf of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program, for funding through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program (CRISI). AAR is a member of the CREATE Program, the largest public-private partnership of its kind bringing together all six Class I railroads, AAR, short line railroads, passenger and commuter rail, and local, state, and federal government agencies.

This CRISI grant will advance CREATE's Rock Island Connection project (P2), the next phase of the larger 75<sup>th</sup> 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 CRISI by improving safety, reliability, and travel times 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 will reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains, which use the same tracks at the Belt Junction in this key corridor. Freight operators run 90 trains through the corridor daily, Amtrak runs 6 weekly Cardinal trains (serving 98,583 riders in fiscal year 2025), and Metra currently runs 30 weekday SWS trains through the corridor (serving 976,376 riders in 2024). 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 reduce the state of good repair backlog and improve freight flows through Belt Junction, particularly to and from the adjacent NS Landers Intermodal Facility (which handled 352,775 annual lifts in 2024).

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 nearly 17 million passengers annually. P2 will greatly improve the reliability of passenger rail service at CUS by allowing Metra to direct 30 weekday 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 via major destinations such as Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Charlottesville, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis.

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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 U.S. intermodal units** and **one-third of rail cars**. This investment is not merely an infrastructure upgrade – it is pivotal step toward enhancing supply chain resilience and fluidity while driving economic growth nationwide.

AAR fully supports this application and looks forward to the successful implementation of the P2 project with your award of **CRISI**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ian Jefferies", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ian Jefferies  
President and CEO  
Association of American Railroads