



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

June 5, 2026

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

RE: Support for Illinois DOT Grant Application for Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program

Dear Administrator Fink:

The Environmental Law & Policy Center 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 (CRISI) Program. The CREATE Program is the largest public-private partnership of its kind, involving the nation's rail industry and all levels of government.

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 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.

A key benefit of the project is to reduce conflicts between freight and passenger trains in the corridor, which use the same tracks at the Belt Junction. 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 Southwest Service (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 trains 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 can also help improve passenger rail performance across Chicago and the Midwest. Chicago's Union Station (CUS) is the Amtrak National Network's busiest station, home to 17 intercity lines, six Metra lines and serving 17 million passengers annually. P2 will allow Metra to

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direct 30 weekday trains away from CUS to 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 City and Chicago Union Station via Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Charlottesville, VA, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard Learner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Howard Learner
Executive Director