

SPRINGFIELD OFFICE
ROOM 300, STATE HOUSE
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS
217-782-5850



DISTRICT OFFICE
10055 W. ROOSEVELT RD. STE E
WESTCHESTER, IL 60154

ILLINOIS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
EMANUEL "CHRIS" WELCH
SPEAKER

January 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:

I write to express my support for the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) application to the Federal Railroad Administration's National Railroad Partnership (NRP) Grant Program. This grant will enable IDOT to construct the Elwood to Braidwood Track Improvement Project for the Chicago to St. Louis High-Speed Rail Corridor.

This project improves and replaces deteriorating or functionally obsolete track components, improves maintenance efficiency, and corrects existing track drainage problems. The proposed work includes the construction of a second mainline track adjacent to the existing mainline track, with a gravel maintenance access facility parallel to the track accessible only to railroad maintenance forces. Grade crossing warning devices for improved safety, train control signaling, and other infrastructure needs (bridges, culverts, fencing) are also included in the scope.

The Elwood to Braidwood Track Improvement Project directly aligns with NRP Grant Program objectives by significantly improving safety, efficiency, and reliability for both freight and passenger rail trains. These improvements make significant contributions to the region's economic competitiveness and development by reducing total freight train delays, minimizing blocked grade crossings in Braidwood, and enabling a minimum 9-minute travel time savings for IDOT's *Lincoln Service* and *Lincoln Service Missouri River Runner* routes.

Given the many public benefits, I urge full and fair consideration to IDOT's application. If you require additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emanuel C. Welch".

Emanuel "Chris" Welch
State Representative, 7th District
Speaker of the Illinois House